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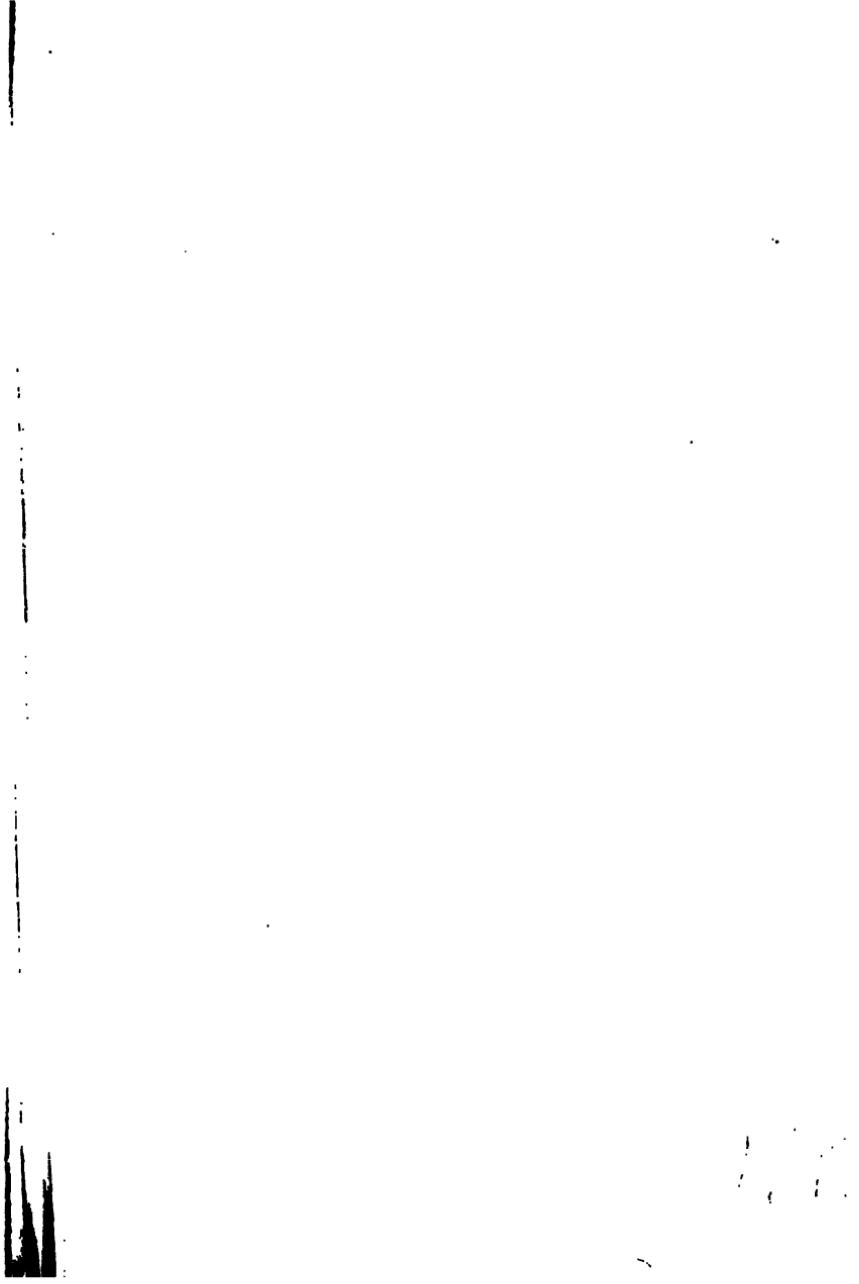


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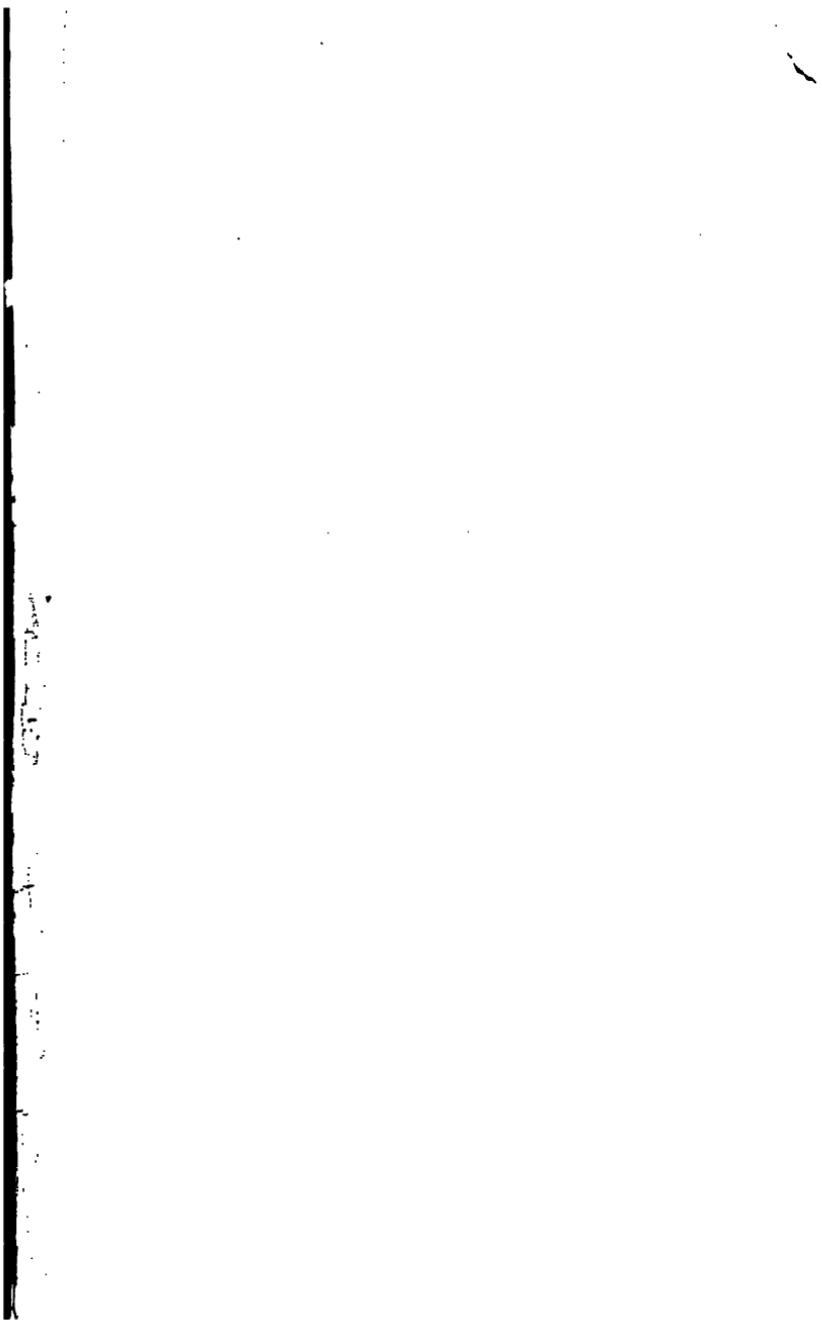
KENADIE

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# JOHN KENADIE

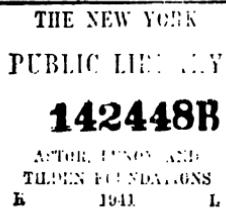
Being  
The Story of His Perplexing  
Inheritance

BY

RIPLEY D. SAUNDERS

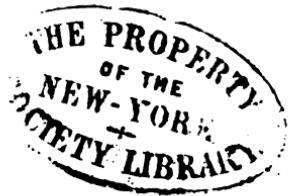


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## JOHN KENADIE

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### I

#### THE SHADOW

LITTLE Miss Sugarlump Kenadie's eyes were filled with the pain of her story's recital. Softly brown, they turned toward the old schoolmaster. She sat silent for a moment. "Mr. Rolfe," she asked, "have n't I good reason to be afraid?"

Gilbert Rolfe lifted his gray head at the words. "It is a strange story, Miss Sugarlump," he said. "I hardly know how to answer you. But it would be an amazing thing if what you fear should come to pass. I cannot believe it likely."

Miss Sugarlump sighed with a little catching of the breath. Her hands, until then quiet in her lap, were moved to meet, the fingers lacing themselves together. "I will ask you this, then, Mr. Rolfe; ought Sonnie and Hugh to know?"

A swift dissent sprang into Gilbert Rolfe's face. "God forbid!" he said. "God forbid!"

"I am afraid then!" cried Miss Sugarlump. "You know there would be danger. See! I tried to separate them when they were little babies. Yet



they are here together. I left Hugh in Kentucky. Yet, a helpless boy, he is here in Arkansas. They should never have met one another. Now, they must grow up here side by side. I am afraid, Mr. Rolfe, because this makes me feel powerless!"

Gilbert Rolfe's grim face softened with pity. "Miss Sugarlump," he asked, "should not the blood of these two boys draw them together in love? Would n't that be very likely to occur?"

"Oh, Mr. Rolfe, Mr. Rolfe!" came the sudden cry at this. "It is their blood that I fear the most! Don't you see this, Mr. Rolfe? don't you see it?"

The schoolmaster made no reply.

"Hugh was only two years old when that dreadful thing happened," said Miss Sugarlump. "Sonnie was not born until some months after. I came away to save him and to save Hugh. And now, Mr. Rolfe, now!"

The gentle little woman bowed her head, its shining brown hair marked with faint touches of gray here and there.

"And I must tell you this, Mr. Rolfe," she said contritely; "before Sonnie was born I prayed, if he were a boy, for a very cruel thing. I knew that he was coming, and I got down on my knees and asked God for this thing to happen. And ever since then I have been begging Him to leave my prayer unanswered. It was a sin. It was my sin. These two little boys should not suffer for



my sin. If there is to be any more suffering, it ought still to be mine, not theirs."

Old Gilbert Rolfe laid his firm hand on Miss Sugarlump's. "You did not know for what you were praying," he said, a man's pitifulness for a woman in his voice. "It was a cry of loneliness and desolation, not a prayer. You must not be afraid. Think of how little there is to fear. Sonnie knows nothing. Hugh knows nothing. It all happened in Kentucky, not here. There is no one to tell Hugh. Sonnie has only you. How could they ever know, Miss Sugarlump?"

There was a great honesty in the old schoolmaster's speech. Little Miss Sugarlump was moved by it. "God grant that you are right!" She spoke gratefully.

Gilbert Rolfe smiled, to the marvelous softening of his gaunt old face. Then he rose to go. "You are afraid of a strange and most unlikely thing," he said gently. "I do not believe you have any cause to fear. But you have interested me more than you realize. I will do everything I can to help you, Miss Sugarlump."

"And you can do a great deal!" was the low response. "Oh, Mr. Rolfe, I am so grateful to you! Sonnie and Hugh will be under your eyes every day. You can do so much, oh, so much!"

And then Gilbert Rolfe went away.

Miss Sugarlump was not properly Miss Sugarlump at all. Her full name was Mrs. Elizabeth

Champlin Kenadie. But her girlhood's nickname had come with her from Kentucky to Arkansas, and the people of the L'Anguille lowlands being of the same friendly and familiar stock, they had adopted it.

A moment after the schoolmaster's departure little Miss Sugarlump called old Uncle Shadrach, her main dependence in the management of her tiny cotton plantation, from the kitchen. He came hobbling into her sitting-room, a brown, gray-pated and wrinkled ancient, with humorous lips and wise face and venerable figure.

"Well, Uncle Shadrach," she said, "Mr. Rolfe has gone, and I've promised to start Sonnie to his school to-morrow. It's high time, goodness knows! Why, Sonnie is ten years old, Uncle Shadrach!"

"Yas 'm, he sho' is dat," agreed Uncle Shadrach. "But Sonnie Kenadie 'll be des as smart as any de res' uv 'em, time ol' Mars' Gilbert Ro'f' git thoo wid 'im. 'Specially dat you's had sech a han' in teachin' uv 'im endurin' all dis time, Miss Sugarlump!"

Mrs. Kenadie smiled faintly at this. "A boy's mother can't do much more than teach him his A B C's," she said. "And, besides, it takes a man to keep a boy straight, Uncle Shadrach."

"Dat it does, Miss Sugarlump," chuckled Uncle Shadrach. "An' Sonnie sho' is been spile mos' ter death!"

"Who did it?" severely inquired little Mrs. Kenadie.

There was no reply to this, the old negro contenting himself with scratching his gray poll as if to discover by that process who did it.

"Uncle Shadrach," said Miss Sugarlump, "you and Aunt Marg'ret don't treat me right at all. You both spoil Sonnie until he becomes outrageous, and then you think it's my fault that he's bad, when it's you two who have made him bad."

The old negro was much concerned at this accusation, or, at least, he appeared much concerned. "'Deed, Miss Sugarlump, honey," he protested, "I ain't spile dat boy. I done teach 'im some things whut's good fo' a boy ter know, 'bout 'n de woods an' de fiel's, an' I ain't gwine deny dat I tol' 'im a sto'ey ever' now an' ag'in, an' sung 'im a song des hyar an' dar. But dat ain't spilin' no boy on dis yer earth, Miss Sugarlump!"

There was an ominous silence. Then Uncle Shadrach resorted to a trick as old as Adam. "Dat ol' Marg'ret, Miss Sugarlump," he ventured, indignation in his voice, "dat ol' 'oman o' mine, she de one whut spile Sonnie Kenadie. Ol' Marg'ret des a bo'n fool 'bout 'n dat boy. She git up in de middle o' de night ter cook him sump'n good ter eat ef he say he hongry. Yas'm, ef Sonnie spile, Miss Sugarlump, yo' kin go right dar in dat kitchen an' lay yo' han' on de one whut spile 'im!"

And at this, as Uncle Shadrach knew was cer-

tain, Miss Sugarlump laughed and the crisis was past. He listened with a complacent visage to her instructions for the next day's work. Then he shuffled back to the kitchen to convey to Sonnie and old Marg'ret the great news of Sonnie's school-going on the morrow.

Bright and early the next morning little Miss Sugarlump Kenadie and her son went schoolward together, past the September fields and through the deep riverland woods, the burden of a strange dread upon the mother's soul, love tugging at her heartstrings. They went hand in hand most of the way, these two; the boy John Kenadie, a big and dark-faced boy, with Miss Sugarlump's gentle brown eyes and sensitive mouth, feeling very joyous that he was in the open and his mother with him. He laughed at Miss Sugarlump when she started in dismay at the sudden whirring rise of what he called a "pa'tridge" from the brown corner of a rail fence skirting the road. Then he puckered his lips and gave the melodious "Bob White!" whistle of the quail. And after that, with both hands to his mouth, he deftly imitated the hollow and mournful call of a woodland dove.

"I would n't shoot a dove, mommie," he explained, "'cause a dove was the bird that brought the green leaf back to the ark, and Noah knew the flood was goin' down. And that's why it's bad luck to shoot a dove, and puts a spell on your gun!"

Then he treated Miss Sugarlump's ears to the abrupt and harsh scream of a jaybird. "And jaybirds all leave the woods ever' Friday," he informed her, "'cause they has to go to the Bad Place and tell the Bad Man what we all are doin' up here. I know, 'cause Uncle Shadrach told me. And nobody ever saw a jaybird in the woods on a Friday!"

All of which tremendously tickled little Miss Sugarlump. "Uncle Shadrach has made you mighty wise," she laughed. "I reckon you'll astonish Mr. Rolfe with all your learning!"

John Kenadie received this shaft in entire unconcern. His face lighted up with a new thought. "I ain't afraid of Mr. Rolfe, mommie," he announced. "I like him, and he likes boys, too. He knows me, and always speaks to me by name when he sees me. I like Mr. Rolfe!"

Little Miss Sugarlump's grasp tightened on her son's hand.

"That's right, Sonnie," she said softly. "And you must like your playmates at school, too, dear. You must like them all."

Her eyes were studying John wistfully.

"There's a little boy you're going to meet, Sonnie," she said in a low tone, "a little boy like you, named — his name is Hugh — Hugh Latham. And you must like him, too, Sonnie. You must be sure and like little Hugh Latham, dear!"

"Oh, mommie, I know about him!" cried John

Kenadie. "He ain't got no kinfolks 'cept a cousin. And he come to her 'cause he had nowhere else to go to, and she's been good to him. He's a orphan boy, mommie!"

Little Miss Sugarlump grew very pale as John spoke.

"Yes, Sonnie," she made answer. "He's an orphan. And I want you to like him because—because of that, Sonnie. You must promise me that you'll like him. Won't you, dear?"

"Yes'm," replied John Kenadie. "I'll like him."

Then, for a brief space, they walked in silence, the troubled little mother and her boy. And so prone is a child to be happy in the open and to voice its happiness as do other happy things, that John Kenadie suddenly began to sing as they walked, one of old Shadrach's homely field songs.

"Whar yo' gwine, bell-cow?  
Whar yo' gwine, bull?  
Gwine to de medders  
Ter git a belly full!"

He had a clear and sweet voice, and little Miss Sugarlump listened in delight to her son's singing. She could not but smile at the unabashed negro dialect in which the boy chanted Uncle Shadrach's song.

"Now sing 'Barbara Allen,' Sonnie," she asked him, when he had finished his tuneful communion with the bell-cow and the bull. The song was of

her own singing as a lullaby, and the boy had known it from babyhood. And he lifted up his melodious voice in the Arkansas woods and sang the old ballad brought from an English farm by one of his ancestors a hundred years and more ago.

“It was about the Martinmas time,  
And the leaves they were a-fallin’,  
When Sir Jamie Graham of the West Countrie  
Fell in love with Barbara Allen.”

And thus did little Miss Sugarlump Kenadie and her son John go to school together this September morning ; the boy singing, the mother loving, hoping, and fearing, the forbidding ghost of an unhappy secret rising before her eyes in the day’s sunshine.

## II

### THE TWO BOYS IN THE SHADOW

EMERGING from the deep shade of the forest road into the sun-flecked clearing where stood the little log schoolhouse of L'Anguille, Miss Sugarlump beheld old Gilbert Rolfe seated on the rough-hewn doorsill deep in converse with a boy at sight of whom her heart gave a quick throb of uncontrollable emotion.

They were not now hand in hand, Miss Sugarlump and her son. Just as they espied the open space which meant their journey's end she had stooped swiftly and kissed John's brow, releasing her hold on his hand at the same moment. Then she assumed as much of a brave air as was possible to her and came forward in the schoolmaster's view.

Gilbert Rolfe advanced to meet them. As if unthinkingly, he laid his hand on the shoulder of the little boy with whom he had been talking, so that the boy was at his side when he spoke to Miss Sugarlump.

"I'm glad to see you, Miss Sugarlump," he said, a quizzical and intentionally reassuring smile on his lips. "I was a little bit afraid you would

turn coward at the last minute and keep John at home."

"Oh, no!" cried little Miss Sugarlump, lifting her brown eyes to meet the schoolmaster's glance. They had been fastened with a yearning softness on the boy standing beside him; a yellow-haired and blue-eyed boy, shy and good-looking. "Oh, no, Mr. Rolfe, I made up my mind once for all that Sonnie must go to school, and I would not let myself think that anything else was possible. And here he is, you see!"

"And it's high time he was here!" laughed old Gilbert Rolfe. "But don't you be downhearted, Miss Sugarlump; John will like school when he gets acquainted with the other children. This is one of his schoolfellows now, Miss Sugarlump—it's little Hugh Latham, and John will very likely be in the same classes with him."

Miss Sugarlump's hand trembled at her bosom for a moment, but the next instant it held that of the boy in its woman's clasp. Her face had suddenly grown very tender.

"I have seen you often before now—Hugh!" she said, and old Gilbert Rolfe felt a tightening of the throat at the softness in her voice. "I reckon you don't know me, but I've known you by sight for a long time."

The boy blushed with all a boy's bashfulness. But his eyes were exceedingly friendly as they met Miss Sugarlump's. He managed to make a shame-faced reply.

"I've seen you, too," he half whispered, digging a bare toe in the grass. "I seen you at church once, when we had a revival, and then I seen you in a store down in town another time. And they told me who you was, so I knew you."

There was something appealing in the boy's manner. It may have been only the desolateness that makes itself felt in the ways of motherless children. It seemed to sound in his voice.

Little Miss Sugarlump stooped suddenly and put her arms around Hugh Latham and stroked him with a lingering tenderness.

"I remember both those times!" she cried, her cheek pressed against Hugh's sunburned one. "I remember both those times well, you poor little lonesome-looking boy, you! Oh, you hurt me so, you hurt me so when you talk that way!"

The boy looked up, surprised and sorry. "I did n't mean to, ma'am," he said quickly.

Old Gilbert Rolfe placed a warning hand on Miss Sugarlump's shoulder. She stood erect at this, but still tremulous.

"It was n't anything, Hugh!" she replied. "It was my fault, not yours. You look so much like — like a little boy who was — who was kin to me — and who is dead. That's why it hurt me, Hugh — that's why it hurt me!"

For a moment there was silence. And then Miss Sugarlump spoke again, with more composure of manner.

"Now, Hugh, you and Sonnie must make each other's acquaintance," she said. "And you must be good friends, too. You must like one another, and play together, and be just like little brothers for —for my sake!"

Again there was a warning in Gilbert Rolfe's glance.

Miss Sugarlump almost laughed as she noticed it. A sudden happiness seemed to have come into her soul.

"Sonnie, dear," she spoke, "shake hands with Hugh, and show him that you like him already."

"No!" said the boy, strangely moved; "no, no!"

When his mother had stooped so swiftly to hug and kiss Hugh Latham, Sonnie started and turned pale, as if in pain; an emotion which somehow did not seem that of a child showed itself in his eyes. As she drew back at touch of the old schoolmaster's hand, Sonnie placed himself between her and Hugh, facing the latter with unmistakable hostility in his bearing; and now, as his mother spoke to him, his hands were clenched and his lips quivering.

"No!" he repeated; "I won't shake hands with him! Why do you kiss him, mommie, when he ain't your boy? What makes you do it?"

Little Mrs. Kenadie, white to the lips, stood gazing wide-eyed at John. Her expression was piteous. Old Gilbert Rolfe saw the peril of the moment.

"It's a child's jealousy," he said to her in a low tone. "Do not mind it now, Miss Sugarlump; do not go any further. It will all come right when they get used to each other."

John Kenadie was still confronting Hugh, interposing as if there was some danger to his mother in Hugh's presence. His eyes were troubled, as if with some new feeling which he could not understand. Little Miss Sugarlump glanced sadly at Gilbert Rolfe.

"Hugh," said the old schoolmaster, "John does n't like to see his mother kiss you. Don't mind him this time,—it is n't because he's unfriendly to you. You'd better join the other children now; and then you two boys can make friends later, as I know you will."

Hugh Latham moved away at these words. He had been facing John resentfully, with boyish defiance in his manner. Yet he gave little Miss Sugarlump an abashed smile as he turned to go.

John Kenadie burst into tears.

"I tried to like him," he muttered, as if speaking to himself. "I wanted to like him; but I could n't,—I could n't. It ain't my fault, mommie."

The boy appeared to be dazed. "It ain't my fault," he repeated; "I tried to like him, mommie,—I tried."

Little Miss Sugarlump put her arm around his shoulders so that the palm of her hand rested caressingly against his cheek.

"Never mind, Sonnie," she said, her voice trembling a bit; "you 'll like him in time, dear. Never mind, Sonnie."

Her eyes were on old Gilbert Rolfe as she spoke. They moved towards the schoolhouse. She turned to him, her words almost a whisper.

"It is not without reason that I have been afraid," she said.

There was a rebuke in the schoolmaster's expression.

"You must be more careful, Miss Sugarlump!" he warned her, deeply in earnest. "You invite danger when you give way as you did just now. You must guard against yourself hereafter."

Mrs. Kenadie bowed her head in acquiescence.

"It was the likeness, Mr. Rolfe," she said humbly. "It was almost as if the dead had come to life! And seeing the two together — and little Hugh looked so solitary and forlorn — oh, Mr. Rolfe, it cut me to the heart!"

"You must accept it, nevertheless," — and the speech was intentionally brusque. . "I tell you this for your own good, Miss Sugarlump. As things are, so must you accept them. Your secret will soon not be a secret otherwise. Can you not see this, Miss Sugarlump?"

"I see it plainly," replied Miss Sugarlump.

Gilbert Rolfe preceded them into the little schoolhouse. It was the scene of his life-work, — dearly loved of this old man, a lowly worshiper of

letters, of nature, and of children,— whither he hobbled happily in most mornings of his quiet year, hobbling because of a wound received during the dreadful war between the States. The wild little Arkansas backwoods children, the girls in calico frocks and the boys in jeans breeches and cotton shirts, were very close to his heart. It was his pleasure to reach the schoolhouse before them each morning and hear them coming to him through the woods, singing and frolicking ; and these children held old Gilbert Rolfe in awesome respect. Despite his tenderness for them, he had a strict soldier manner ; and they had heard from their parents of the importance of his family in Virginia,— a tradition of great weight in the L'Anguille lowlands. They were gathered now about the door, awaiting his summons to their studies.

Little Sim Perkins saw fit to stand on his hands as the procession, headed by the schoolmaster, went past. He waved one bare and dusty foot in token of greeting to the new boy, resuming his normal position with a leer of unmistakable challenge to competitive acrobatics. Sonnie's solemn face relaxed at this, and a smile of the most unqualified friendliness ended in a genuine boy's chuckle of approval.

“ May I stay until the children are seated and the lessons about to begin ? ” little Miss Sugarlump asked ; and Gilbert Rolfe was glad to comfort her with this entreated grace-time.

"I will seat John near me for the morning," he said to her, "until, you know, Miss Sugarlump, I give him his regular place in the school."

"Place him beside a good boy, then," whispered Miss Sugarlump; and Gilbert Rolfe, though knowing well how rare are white blackbirds, nodded his head gravely.

Wherefore it followed a little time thereafter that Miss Sugarlump Kenadie, the dread moment of parting come, suddenly swooped down on John as he sat under the school's eyes, kissed him fervently many times,—to his great disgrace before his fellows,—and then ran away, sobbing pitifully. Gilbert Rolfe promptly silenced the thoughtless little laugh which followed Miss Sugarlump out into the lonely open away from her surrendered son.

With equal suddenness, a few hours later, John Kenadie himself stood up in view of the whole school, his face white with suffering, his lips quivering with a pathetic pain.

"I'm going home!" he announced to all heaven and earth.

The forenoon had passed quietly and almost happily for Sonnie. He had been vastly interested in the mysteries of the school routine. There was a quaint gravity in his earnest eyes,—his mother's brown eyes,—now opened wide with boyish curiosity, now narrowed with inward contemplation of the day's astounding adventures. He had fared

reasonably well at the recess hour, greatly enjoying the luncheon with which his mother had provided him, and making some friends among the other children.

But with the afternoon "books" a horror came upon his soul that it had never known before. It was a poignant loneliness, as of one cast away on a desert island. It seemed to John Kenadie that it had been years since he last moved among what were his life's familiar surroundings until this black and awesome day. The thought of his mother, sitting at her sewing now or going about in some task of housekeeping, caused a big lump to rise in his throat. He knew that Uncle Shadrach was out in the fields at this hour picking cotton, and he longed to hear the old negro's homely speech. Aunt Marg'ret, she would be singing some ancient camp-meeting hymn at work in the kitchen. The utter woe and desolation of homesickness gripped Sonnie's heart.

"I'm going home!" he cried. It was a despairing cry, and the school snickered at its uplifting; but John Kenadie strode down the aisle towards the open door.

"Good-by, Mr. Rolfe!" he called from that point of vantage, with a pathetic attempt at polite deference even in insubordinate flight. "I think my mother" (and what a break came in his voice at this!) — "I think my mother wants me at — at home, Mr. Rolfe!"

And that she did want him, the wistful little Miss Sugarlump in her so empty and lonely home, longing for her son with all a mother's hungry and jealous longing, who could doubt? Was she not standing at her door even then looking out into the bright sunlight, that seemed to her so dark, wondering if the dear God would not for her sake hasten the flight of time, that Sonnie might come back to her?

John Kenadie was right to fly, old Gilbert Rolfe said to himself; the boy and his mother had suffered enough for one day. He was a truant and a rebel against lawful authority; but old Gilbert Rolfe wished more power to his little legs as he saw them flashing down the road in a fine race straight towards home and Miss Sugarlump.

### III

#### FOR STRANGE HATE'S SAKE

SONNIE KENADIE returned to school the next day steeled to endure whatever fate might have in store for him. He had been greatly comforted by little Miss Sugarlump and he carried a stout heart in his bosom, even though it was a heart with an exceptional capacity for loving. He marched sturdily and straightly to old Gilbert Rolfe.

"I'm sorry I ran away from school yesterday, Mr. Rolfe," he said. "I won't run away again. I'm going to stay now."

His solemn demeanor secretly tickled the schoolmaster. But Gilbert Rolfe kept his own face properly severe and impassive. There was often a laugh behind his grimmest countenance if his scholars had only known.

"If you promise me that, John," he replied judicially, "I won't punish you this time. Do you give me your promise?"

"Yes, sir," answered Sonnie with a gulp.

And so an understanding was happily reached between them. But the matter was not so easily settled with Sonnie Kenadie's schoolmates. Children dispose of these affairs after their own way.

The boy's real ordeal was faced at recess, sheerly because there was no earlier opportunity for his fellows to hold him to an accounting. Once out in the open, with a good hour of freedom before them, the rough country lads of Gilbert Rolfe's school hastened to the torturing of their victim. He was a stranger and had behaved in an unconventional manner.

"Was mammie glad to see her little honey?" derisively shouted "Fatty" Yarbrough, the resourceful leader of most of the school's devilment, as trustful Sonnie hastened to join the band of playing boys. He had come forth beaming with friendliness, his spirit eager for games and companionship. A shout of mocking laughter greeted his appearance and this opening sally.

"And he could n't stay away from mammie, neither," came a tantalizing drawl from another of the group, Jim Prewitt, who pointed an especially gnarled and ominous forefinger at Sonnie Kenadie, the uninitiated. "Jes' had to go home, he did!" and the drawl ended in a lugubrious wail intended to vocally depict the woes of homesickness. By this time a remorseless circle had formed around the lonely one.

Sonnie, surprised and shocked, so confident had he been of friendliness, looked around him at the ring of gibing boys, bewildered and something shamed. He could not long mistake their meaning. They were hostile to him.

"I ain't going to run away to-day," he vouch-safed half proudly and yet with a treacherous sinking of the heart at fleeting thought of little Miss Sugarlump. "I'm going to stay till school's out!"

A taunting hoot of laughter arose at this.

John Kenadie, for all his gentleness, was of a high spirit, and his temper began to stir under such treatment. He fronted his persecutors with a face that paled proportionately as his glance became steadier and more menacing.

"If you think I'm afraid of you," he announced to the circle of his foes, "you're mighty badly mistaken. I ain't any afraid of the whole lot of you or of any one of you!"

At this point Hugh Latham joined in the sport.

"He's a cry-baby!" said Hugh. "He cried yesterday 'cause his mother kissed me — she kissed me 'fore I knew it — and he was cryin' when he ran home to her from school. I saw him out o' the window! He's a cry-baby, that's what he is!"

John Kenadie turned and looked at Hugh Latham.

He did not speak in reply to the taunt. He only gazed straight into the eyes of the boy who uttered it. A little shiver ran through his body. Since yesterday he had been trying to like Hugh.

"Let's not play with him!" urged Hugh Latham contemptuously and with the authority of a leader. "Who wants to play with a cry-baby?"

"Don't!" said John. "Don't go any further. Don't!"

There was a queer ring in his voice. He never took his eyes off Hugh's face. They were cold and yet instinct with hatred.

"Don't what?" asked Hugh Latham angrily. "Are you talkin' to me, John What's-your-name? Don't what?"

"Don't make me mad," answered Sonnie. "I don't want to hurt you."

It was an absurd speech. Hugh was the bigger boy.

As it was uttered a shout of laughter rose. But Sonnie did not seem to mind. Indeed, he was strangely unconscious now of the others. He seemed to have knowledge of Hugh only.

"I promised I'd try and like you," he said. And then he repeated, "I don't want to hurt you!"

Hugh Latham laughed with the others.

"You don't want to hurt me!" he mocked. "Do you know why you don't, Sonnie What's-your-name? It's because you're afraid of gettin' hurt yourself. Why, you little cry-baby, I can lick a ten-acre field full of boys like you!"

As Hugh spoke these words John Kenadie sprang at him and struck him full in the face, knocking him backward against the ring of boys.

"I'll kill you!" he said — as a man would have said it.

Hugh recovered himself, his lips bleeding, and John Kenadie was on him again, white in the face, his teeth showing, his eyes ablaze. As Hugh struck out wildly, still dazed by the first blow, John hit him again in the face, twice, with each hand, and in deadly earnest. It was not like a boy's fighting. There was something sinister in the deep hostility of it.

Hugh Latham was not a coward, and he had been in more fights than John. He shook his head viciously, shutting and opening his eyes, then with just a moment's pause he rushed in and closed with his enemy.

It was a good grapple, and Hugh gave Sonnie more than one blow as they came together. But the latter was an instinctive fighter and his blows were the harder and swifter. All the time, too, his lips were half parted, his teeth shining between in a sort of smile. Hugh's advantage in size was overcome by the fierceness of John's fighting.

Suddenly, seeing his opportunity, John Kenadie's left arm shot out quickly and closed around Hugh's neck, drawing him tightly in to the other's body. It was a winning hold.

"Holler 'nuff, Hugh!" a chorus of shouts sounded from the dismayed ring. "Holler 'nuff! You can't do anything!"

But John Kenadie did not ask his antagonist to say any word of surrender. Silently, and still with the same swiftness and force of a compelling

hatred, he struck the lowered face again and again with his right fist, savagely and cruelly.

A girl's voice, appalled, rang out in a pitiful little cry. John remembered it afterwards—it was Betty Thorndike's voice.

"Don't! Oh, please don't!" it said. "Oh, you're hurting him so!"

And still Hugh Latham was silent, plucky as a gamecock and struggling only to bring the combat back to even terms. His face, showing now and then as he twisted under John's arm, was all bloody.

Gilbert Rolfe's strong old hand was laid on John Kenadie's collar, jerking him away from Hugh as one fighting dog is pulled from another. The boy came out of the clinch defiant of all authority.

"I told you you'd better let me alone!" he cried, shaking his fist at Hugh and trying to break from the old schoolmaster's grasp. "You'll do it next time, I reckon!"

Hugh returned the defiance. "No, I won't!" he gasped, wiping blood from his face. "I'll whip you next time, that's what I'll do!"

"Silence, and be ashamed, both of you!" commanded old Gilbert Rolfe. "March into the schoolhouse, straight, and if I hear a word from either of you I'll thrash you within an inch of your lives!"

It was a soldier's voice, the tones sharp and

dominant, not to be disobeyed. The schoolmaster's will made itself felt, and the two boys went silently ahead of him indoors.

When the children had all assembled for the afternoon books, Gilbert Rolfe, having inquired into the particulars of the quarrel and its resultant fight, called the two principals before him.

"If I switched anybody for this," he said to the school, "I ought to switch every boy of the lot of you. You had no business setting on this one boy and badgering him half to death. That's the only thing that saves him from a whipping — because each one of you is as much to blame as he is. John Kenadie, I'm surprised at you and ashamed of you. What would your mother have said if she saw you just now?"

Sonnie made no reply. The light of battle had died out of his eyes and they were sombre with a sense of guilt. There was a strange bewilderment in them as they chanced to rest on Hugh Latham.

"Hugh," said the old schoolmaster, "from what I hear, you would n't rest till you made John fight you. You richly deserve a hiding!"

For a moment he contemplated both boys in grave silence.

"Hugh Latham," he spoke at last, "go out to the rain-barrel and wash your face and then come back here and take your seat and don't let me hear another word from you. John Kenadie, you go and sit with the girls for the rest of the afternoon

and see if you can't get some of their gentleness in you. Sit there in that vacant place by Betty Thorndike. And remember that I'll keep my eye on you!"

Thus it came about, in the aftermath of a battle, that John Kenadie made acquaintance with this Betty Thorndike; going to her side as a convicted criminal, with a dirty face, a bruised nose, and a swollen lip, the consciousness of disgrace heavy upon him.

It was even a more trying ordeal than the fight, thus to be cast bodily among strange girls, with the little Thorndike maiden at first frightened and then contemptuous of him. Still moved as he was by the excitement of his encounter with Hugh, the shamed and blushing boy noted the shrinking away of Betty Thorndike — and it hurt the gentler side of him. He was not an animal, to be feared in this manner. And then he saw, as Betty's feminine alarm died away, that she was making fun of him to the other girls. He detected her covert and derisive signals calling attention to his warworn plight. Each signal made him flush anew with boyish mortification.

And his suffering was the greater because of the circumstance, as he ultimately discovered, that Betty Thorndike was an alarmingly pretty girl. He could not but observe that her hair, kept back from her forehead by an old-fashioned comb, was good to look upon, being of a rich brown with just

a flash of reddish gold ; that her eyes were impudently blue, her nose little and tilted, her lips curved with laughter. These notations added mightily to the boy's embarrassment. He would rather have faced a hundred Hugh Lathams than to sit here at the shoulder of this fascinating and scornful creature.

It was long before John Kenadie forgot the cruel bearing of Betty Thorndike on this occasion. The tossing of her head when she found him watching her, the ostentatious avoidance of her edging away from him, the degrading publicity of her derision of him, these things were hard to endure. And, not being of a patient disposition, when Betty at the close of school made a great point of her joy at release from him, turning up her provoking nose and shrugging her plump shoulders with what seemed to him an unpardonable audacity, John Kenadie's temper again asserted itself.

"I did n't like it any more 'n you, Miss Smarty!" he said hotly, but blushing most for shame. "I hated you the minute I laid eyes on you!"

"I'd wash my face before I talked to a girl, if I was you!" retorted Miss Thorndike. "Dirty-faced boys are just like pigs!"

"I'll wash it when I'm good and ready," replied the incensed John. "And you need n't talk, either. You've got freckles all over yours, and they won't wash off. And if I was a girl and had red hair like you, I'd kill myself!"

This astounding attack in force dismayed Betty. "You're telling what ain't true!" she cried, tears of mortified vanity starting to her eyes. "I ain't freckled, and I ain't redhead, and you know it!"

"Red hair!" jeered the seemingly cruel but secretly ashamed John Kenadie. "Freckles!" he taunted, almost touching them. Upon which little Betty Thorndike burst out crying and ran away from him, hurling back a declaration of war.

"I hate you!" she sobbed. "Don't you ever speak to me again! I hate you! And I'll hate you to my dying day!"

## IV

### A FADED PHOTOGRAPH

PITIFULLY disturbed by John Kenadie's story of his fight with Hugh Latham, the boy himself unable to tell it without betraying the strangest agitation, little Miss Sugarlump allowed Sonnie to return to school the next day unburdened with instructions save to the effect that he must be a good boy and come home to her straightway when school was out. She felt singularly helpless at the moment.

But no sooner was John gone than Miss Sugarlump put on her black Sunday bonnet and was shortly driving away from home in the venerable buggy which was her equipage of state. An hour thereafter she was making diplomatic acquaintance with Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter, the distant cousin who now stood in the place of mother to Hugh Latham and who was a new-comer in the L'Anguille lowlands.

"I was afraid you'd have hard feelings towards Sonnie," she said at once, "on account of his fight with Hugh yesterday, so I thought I'd come and talk it all over with you and make sure that you did n't."

Mrs. Poindexter was a softly stout person of cheerful soul.

"Oh, shucks, Mrs. Kenadie!" she replied easily. "I'm mighty glad you came, but it wa'n't worth your while to worry about such a little thing as that. Boys will be boys, you know, and it seems like they've just got to fight among themselves. I declare to you and cross my heart that I never gave it a second thought!"

Miss Sugarlump smiled gratefully.

"It has frightened me," she said, with a deeper truthfulness than her hearer could realize. Then she continued: "Sonnie has just started to school, and I wanted him to like all of his playmates, Hugh especially, because — because I knew Hugh was an orphan and — and had told Sonnie about him. And it just cut me to the heart, it did hurt me, Mrs. Poindexter, when he told me of his fight with Hugh — you don't know how much!"

Mrs. Poindexter leaned back in her chair and laughed. She had a habit of lifting her hands from her wide lap and gently smiting them together when she laughed, which made it seem very unctuous and comical.

"Lawdy bless you, child!" she chuckled. "You've surely got a lot to learn about boys! But there's one thing, Mrs. Kenadie — Hugh didn't have to tell me that he'd been fighting. Your little boy must have come off a heap easier than he did!"

"What do you mean, Mrs. Poindexter?" Miss Sugarlump asked.

"Why, I could see it for myself!" cried the other, utterly without malice. "It did just make me a little bit mad at first, I must say, for one of Hugh's eyes was nearly shut up, Mrs. Kenadie, and he certainly wa'n't handsome with his upper lip sticking out like a bee had stung him; but I had to laugh about it afterwards. It's just boy nature, that's what it is, and you've got to get used to it!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said little Miss Sugarlump, with genuine pain in her voice. "I did n't know Hugh was really hurt, poor little fellow! It was just the fact of their fighting that worried me. He is n't — he is n't that way now, is he, Mrs. Poindexter?"

Again the hands were lifted from the wide lap, but they were merely fluttered in a milder mood of humorous appreciation, not smitten together. Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter's untroubled eyes were full of laughter.

"You would n't know anything had happened to him!" she responded, beaming on Miss Sugarlump. "Goodness, Mrs. Kenadie, these things don't leave no scars! Hugh went on to school this morning just like nothing had happened; chirrupy as a cricket — and I'm just morally certain he didn't remember one single solitary word of the lecture I gave him!"

Little Mrs. Kenadie could not but laugh joyously.

"You're mighty good to Hugh, I've been told, Mrs. Poindexter," she said, a deep friendliness in

her tones. "And he isn't very close kin to you either, is he?"

"He's close enough kin," jealously answered Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter. "He's only second cousin to me, but he did n't seem to have any closer kin in the world, so I was mighty glad to have the poor little fellow come to me. Anyway, nobody can say Hugh's being raised by strangers. He's being raised by his own kin!"

A queer little tremor passed through Miss Sugarlump at this, and her eyes were suddenly lowered, almost as if she had been shamed in some way. Then they were resting on Mrs. Poindexter again gratefully.

"It's mighty good of you," she said. "Second cousins ain't close kin, and — and — and it seems strange there was no one closer to Hugh than that, does n't it, Mrs. Poindexter? But, of course, you know all about his folks!"

"Well, now, Mrs. Kenadie," frankly replied Mrs. Poindexter, "to tell you the simple truth, the sum and substance of all I knew was that I had some Latham kin in Kentucky. Of course, I feel certain that Hugh had no closer kin than me when his father died, because that's what his father said when he left word to send Hugh to me — that I was the only one he had any right to come to. It seems that the Latham stock in Kentucky had all died out. You know how it is with families sometimes. And Hugh's father was the last one of them

all. I don't know when Hugh's mother died. I did n't even know him, Mrs. Kenadie, but he knew of me as his cousin, living near Memphis then, and he told the people where he died to send little Hugh to me with the pitiful few dollars that was all he had to leave. And I'm glad he did, because Hugh was hardly more than a baby, he was only four years old, and he was kin to me, and I had no children of my own, and he's been a great comfort to me. And, of course, when we came here from Memphis, where we lived till lately, I started Hugh to Mr. Rolfe's school, just as I would if he was my own son. And he's like a son to me, now."

Mrs. Kenadie drew a quick and deep breath as Mrs. Poindexter finished. She had been listening with what seemed almost a breathless attention. As the simple and yet touching little story proceeded, her hands had been restless in her lap. Now they were still.

"I've seen Hugh several times since you all came here to live," she said. "And I saw you once at revival service, Mrs. Poindexter, and was going to speak to you and make your acquaintance, but somebody stopped me to talk, and you went off home before I could get away from them. And I've meant to come and see you right away, but five miles apart is a right good distance, and I'm a poor hand at going away from home, anyway."

"I ain't much of a gadabout myself," smiled Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter. "But I'm mighty

glad now that you have come, Mrs. Kenadie, because it seems to me we're going to like one another real well." And then she laughed and lifted her hands and smote them together. "Even if Hugh and Sonnie do have a fight every now and then!" she said.

Little Miss Sugarlump joined in the laugh with a glad willingness. This friendly and unaffected woman, who stood as a mother to Hugh Latham, seemed very lovable to Miss Sugarlump.

"I shall expect you to return this visit right soon, Mrs. Poindexter," she announced. "You can get over that five miles just as easy as I can, and I won't believe you're friendly if you put off doing it too long. We know each other now, and you've got to be sociable!"

"Child," said Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter, "I'm coming to see you, don't you be afraid, and before very long, I reckon. I've taken a shine to you. But don't you count on my doing it too often. I've got a husband to look after, and it's part of his religion that neither one of us has any business anywhere except right at home. He's that kind — I could n't drive him off our own doorsill if I took a hickory stick to him!"

And the hands went out of the wide lap again, only to fall back with a gesture of helplessness. Then Mrs. Poindexter suddenly sat up straight.

"What are you getting ready to do?" she asked suspiciously.

"I must be going home," replied little Miss Sugarlump. "It's a good hour's drive, you know, and it's time I was going."

"You must be doing nothing of the sort!" cried Mrs. Poindexter indignantly. "You are going to stay right here and eat dinner with me, and go home after dinner. I know exactly how the land lies with you. There isn't an earthly thing to call you back home until it's time for Sonnie to get home from school. I'll see that you get back by that time. But you've got to stay now!"

There was so much heartiness in the invitation that Miss Sugarlump had neither any inclination to decline nor any fear that she would wear out her welcome. Her own liking for Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter was so instinctive and unqualified that she felt sure it must be reciprocated. She instantly agreed, and settled down for a comfortable visit.

It was noticeable in the neighborly forenoon's conversation which followed that little Miss Sugarlump managed to lead Mrs. Poindexter into talking a deal about Hugh Latham. There was little difficulty in doing this, because Mrs. Poindexter was temperamentally disposed to dwell at much length on all the details of her simple life, and Hugh was one of these details. She told Miss Sugarlump all about the boy; how desolate and neglected he was when he first came to them, how entirely without any kinship connection closer than

their own, how typically the lonely little orphan he appeared when he had ended his pitiful pilgrimage from Kentucky, and found a safe haven with the Poindexters.

"I do believe, Mrs. Kenadie," said Mrs. Poindexter, "that the only thing in this wide world which Hugh had in his poor little satchel, except a change or two of mighty raggedy clothing, was an old likeness of his pa, which somebody must have just shoved in along with the other things. It's got Mr. Latham's name and the date on it, and a stranger would guess Hugh was his son, because there's such a strong resemblance. It's in my own album now — well, I'll just show it to you, Mrs. Kenadie, so you can see what kind of a looking man Hugh's pa was!"

Miss Sugarlump's eyes had been moist with pity as Mrs. Poindexter's story of the desolateness of Hugh Latham was told. A startled, almost a frightened look sprang into them at its closing words. Her fingers were tightly gripped together and she sat rigid and white.

"Here it is," cried Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter, coming to Miss Sugarlump with her old family album open. "And he must have been a right good-looking man, Mrs. Kenadie — and Hugh is the speaking image of him!"

Miss Sugarlump received the book in her lap and bent her head over it. A faded old photograph confronted her, the handsome, reckless face of a

young countryman, the features well-cut and regular, a half-laughing and carelessly defiant expression resting upon them. Miss Sugarlump's hands were shaking, but she placed the book on her knees and looked at the photograph silently, her head bowed low.

"Hugh is very much like him," she said at last quietly. "Oh, yes, Mrs. Poindexter, any one would notice the resemblance at once! They—they could n't help but see it. I—I can see it in every feature!"

"And I've been talking entirely too much about Hugh and his affairs, have n't I, Mrs. Kenadie?" said Mrs. Poindexter apologetically. "I can see that you're dead tired of it all, and I won't bother you with any more of it. But I just thought you might like to see that picture!"

"And I did want to see it!" cried Miss Sugarlump, her eyes still fastened on the open page. "And I'm very glad to hear all about Hugh. I feel so—I took to Hugh when I first saw him, Mrs. Poindexter, and I want Sonnie and him to be good friends!"

Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter chuckled. "They have n't made a very good start, have they?" she asked. "But that don't count, Mrs. Kenadie. They are apt to like each other better just because they have fought!"

And then, the responsibility of dinner occurring to her, Mrs. Poindexter laughingly informed Miss

Sugarlump that she must go to the kitchen for a few minutes.

"You just amuse yourself while I'm gone," she said in her motherly manner to Miss Sugarlump. "You can look over that old album if you want to see what sort of folks I come from."

And little Miss Sugarlump did interest herself with the album when Mrs. Poindexter had gone. Not in looking over it; she never turned a page. Her eyes rested on the one picture of the man who was Hugh Latham's father. They were filled with sorrow and with love. She lifted the book from her lap and, bending her head, touched her lips to the faded old photograph.

"Hugh," she whispered, as if to living flesh and blood, "I forgive you, Hugh! Do you know now that I forgive you? I could not while you were living, nor even when I first knew that you were dead. But I forgive you now, Hugh, oh, I forgive you now, and I want the two boys to love one another!"

The old album was closed when Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter returned to her guest. And little Miss Sugarlump was quiet and calm.

But several times in the course of her long ride homeward that afternoon, Mrs. Kenadie fell into little spells of sudden weeping. She would have to clear her eyes with pitiful tossings of the head, having a fixed belief that her docile old horse would inevitably run away with her if she lifted even one hand from the reins.

## V

### A LESSON OUT OF SCHOOL

"I HAVE come to see you this afternoon, Miss Sugarlump," said Gilbert Rolfe, carefully depositing his hickory stick and soft hat in the corner of Mrs. Kenadie's shady veranda, "because I felt positive you would be worrying yourself to death over those two boys!"

"It's mighty good of you!" replied little Miss Sugarlump. "Oh, Mr. Rolfe, I am so troubled! Sonnie tells me that Hugh was still quarrelsome to-day and they came near having another fight. I'll have to find the money to send him away to school, if I can. It seems to me the best thing to do now."

"Exactly so, ma'am," Gilbert Rolfe commented dryly. "I knew that you would make up your mind to precisely some such course as that. And it would be the most foolish thing in the world!"

Miss Sugarlump regarded him with unhopeful eyes.

"I think Sonnie's fight with Hugh was the most dreadful thing possible," she said. "I cannot stand the thought that these two little boys should grow up hating each other. Oh, if they only

knew—and yet that would be the greatest danger of all—the greatest danger of all!"

"They are only two little boys, as you say," retorted the old schoolmaster. "It is true they have had a fight, but so do other boys fight. They will live here when they are grown. If they get used to each other as children, the love that should exist between them—and love it should be, Miss Sugarlump—will come gradually. If you make so much of this boys' fight, and separate them with that in their minds, you will be working against the very thing you hope for. You must let Sonnie come back to school."

"I am afraid—I am afraid!" cried Miss Sugarlump. "Sonnie and Hugh, what will they be to each other, Mr. Rolfe? You say that blood is thicker than water, but is it making them love one another, Mr. Rolfe? No matter what had happened, would n't you think their blood would make this certain? I know I thought otherwise once, but it was because of that other awful thing, and because of my own bitter and sinful prayers, and I was under the shadow of it all. But now, Mr. Rolfe, ought n't Nature to bring things right? And yet—and yet—see what they have done at the very beginning!"

"Miss Sugarlump," said Gilbert Rolfe firmly, "you must send Sonnie back to school. It means happiness for you in the end—or, at least, it promises to save you from that greater unhappiness which you fear."

There was no reply to this speech.

"Can't you realize the wisdom of doing this?" asked the schoolmaster. "You tried to make sure that Sonnie and Hugh would never meet in this world. Fate has brought them where they will probably live their lives out in the same neighborhood. You must now compromise with Fate. And who knows? The very thing that you tried to prevent may bring a happy solution that would not be possible in any other way!"

Little Miss Sugarlump was softly crying; a pitiful little figure. It touched old Gilbert Rolfe to the heart.

"I will do what you say is best, Mr. Rolfe," she spoke at last. "I am bewildered and frightened until I don't know what to do. And you are a man and can see such things more clearly. If you say for me to send Sonnie back to school I will send him!"

"I say it with all my soul," was the instant reply. And then the schoolmaster added: "And here's what we must both do, also, Miss Sugarlump. We must both let Sonnie and Hugh work out this problem in their own way. We must leave them alone, just as we would leave any other two boys alone. If they fight, they must fight. They will make friends afterward, and be all the better friends, maybe. But you and I must not interfere too much, Miss Sugarlump. You spoke just now of Nature's way. Why should we not let Nature have her way?"

Miss Sugarlump looked up quickly, almost with a smile.

"Upon my soul, Mr. Rolfe," she said. "There, I believe you said the wisest thing that any man could say to me! It is Nature's business, after all, is n't it? It is her law that must be enforced, is n't it? And Nature is on our side. And her law is in our favor. Oh, Mr. Rolfe, I believe you have pointed the way to a happy ending of it all!"

There was something pathetic in the glad eagerness with which Miss Sugarlump hailed this new bow of promise in her sky. It changed her mood in a flash—she was a happy-hearted little woman by virtue of her normal temperament. It was not long until she was laughing merrily at something the old schoolmaster said and then insisting that he remain to supper with her and Sonnie.

"They won't know at home what's become of me," Gilbert Rolfe demurred. His home, which was that of his stanch friends, the Prewitts, was really very like home to him, as like as is possible to lonely old men without kith or kin. But little Mrs. Kenadie would not listen to this argument.

"I'll send them word!" was her quick retort. "Uncle Shadrach can go and tell them you are staying here for supper!" And the next moment she was at the steps of the Southern "gallery," or veranda, calling, in a voice that was still almost a girl's voice:—

"Uncle Shadrach! Oh, Uncle Shadrach!"

She had to call more than once, but at last it was apparent that the musical summons had been heard.

"Yas'm! Yas'm! Yas'm, Miss Sugarlump! I'se a-comin'," a mournful voice answered her, following which Uncle Shadrach hobbled into view. The old negro carried in his hand a broken plow-trace which he had evidently been mending.

"I want you to go to the Prewitts' for me, Uncle Shadrach," said Miss Sugarlump, "and tell them that Mr. Rolfe is going to stay here for supper with us."

Uncle Shadrach's face was a study for length and lugubriousness. "Me, Miss Sugarlump?" he inquired plaintively.

"Yes, you, of course!" answered little Mrs. Kenadie. "Was n't it you I was calling?"

"To de Prewitts' place?" and astonishment was now in Uncle Shadrach's voice. "Lawdy, Miss Sugarlump, hit's nigh on to supper time dis minnit!"

"It's an hour till supper time, and you know it!" said his mistress indignantly. "You can do it easy and be back before supper. Go on, Uncle Shadrach!"

"Miss Sugarlump, I got dis yer plow-trace ter men'," expostulated the old negro. "I ain't got no time ter be runnin' all ober de country dis time o' day. Don't yo' see how busy I is, Miss Sugarlump?"

" You 've just got to do it, Uncle Shadrach ! " proclaimed Mrs. Kenadie emphatically. " And you can call Sonnie from Aunt Marg'ret and take him along with you. And I 'll tell Marg'ret to cook you something extra good for your supper, too. Go along now, Uncle Shadrach ! "

" I des declar', Miss Sugarlump ! " — but it was plain the old man was about to capitulate — " Lawsy me ! Lawsy me ! " — by now Uncle Shadrach had all but started on his errand. " An' das all I got ter tell 'em, Miss Sugarlump ? des dat Marse Gilbert Ro'f' gwine stay hyar ter supper wid us ? "

" That 's all, Uncle Shadrach," replied the finally victorious Mrs. Kenadie ; and old Uncle Shadrach hobbled out of view, shaking his head and complaining to himself bitterly. But a moment later he and John Kenadie were heard starting off in company, the boy already plying him with a boy's eager questioning about a thousand things, and old Shadrach was chuckling with delight.

" Do you know, Mr. Rolfe," said little Miss Sugarlump with just a tinge of jealousy in her tone, " I don't believe a mother ever exactly understands her son. It 's a strange thing ! "

" Why, Miss Sugarlump ? " asked the old schoolmaster, smiling. " And what is so strange ? "

" Well, this, for example," responded Miss Sugarlump. " To me, Sonnie seems the gentlest of boys. He dearly loves books ; he 's a great

reader even now, Mr. Rolfe, in certain books he found among the few I have. And he's passionately fond of hearing me recite the poems I learned by heart when I was a girl. And the old ballads I know, like 'Barbara Allen,' and 'Ye banks and braes o' Bonnie Doon,' and things like that, why, he'll listen to them by the hour! And he loves best the very ones that I love best!"

Gilbert Rolfe was instantly interested at this.

"But here's the strange thing, Mr. Rolfe," continued Miss Sugarlump. "Old Shadrach tells me that Sonnie is the most reckless boy he ever saw. He says that Sonnie just seems to love danger—that in climbing trees, or in fooling around horses, or when they go fishing in a dug-out down on the L'Anguille River, it's as much as he can do to keep Sonnie from coming to harm, he takes so many chances. And this dreadful fight, Mr. Rolfe!"—here Miss Sugarlump paled a bit—"why, I simply don't know my own son!"

The old schoolmaster laughed.

"It's the boy in him, Miss Sugarlump, that's all!" he said. "You find it hard to understand, because it's a matter of sex. You must just make allowances for the man side of Sonnie, Miss Sugarlump!"

"Well," said Miss Sugarlump wistfully, "I wish the man side of him was gentle, too. I'd like it much better!"

And Gilbert Rolfe had gained a clue for the shaping of Sonnie.

After supper that evening, the old schoolmaster made earnest converse with John Kenadie concerning the boy's reading. He was a born teacher of children, this humble backwoods schoolmaster, with a reverence for his craft that was noble in its simple sincerity. He went right at the heart of things with Sonnie, the childish things which show so unerringly the manner of man into which a boy is likely to grow.

"Now show me the books you have read, John," he said, when the two of them had finished an intimate talk, the old teacher as grave and as interested as the solemn-faced Sonnie.

Little Mrs. Kenadie laughed to see them in front of her little bookcase, the boy all eagerness under Gilbert Rolfe's masterly diplomacy, and utterly unconscious of self.

"Here's one of them!" he cried gleefully. "It's 'Robinson Crusoe.' I reckon I've read that a hundred times, Mr. Rolfe!"

"I reckon so, too!" agreed the white-haired old teacher. And he himself fingered the book lovingly.

"And here's another — the 'Rabian Nights'!" announced Sonnie. "And this one, too, 'Pilgrim's Progress'! And here's a Bible full of pictures, Mr. Rolfe, and mighty fine stories, too," — there could be no taint of irreverence in Sonnie's literary ardor and simplicity, — "and here's the 'Lib'ary of Poetry and Song,' Mr. Rolfe!"

"John," said the old schoolmaster, "you're a well-read boy!"

And Gilbert Rolfe knew well the nobility of that little stock of books shown to him by John Kenadie. He cherished every one of them in his own heart. He took from the bookcase two volumes, the "Robinson Crusoe" and the "Library of Poetry and Song."

"I want you to read something to me, John," he said, not at all in the manner of a schoolmaster. "It's been a long time since I heard anything from either one of these."

Sonnie was completely fooled by the cunning of Gilbert Rolfe. It was to him as if some other bookish boy was waiting to hear the charm of the words of these books. He sat himself down at the old schoolmaster's knee, far too intent on the interest of his undertaking to have any thought of his performance as a reader. With familiar fingers he turned the pages of "Robinson Crusoe," to the chapter where Crusoe suddenly comes across the footprint on the sands of the lonely beach. He read this as breathlessly as was possible to a little boy struggling with the printed word. He was entirely absorbed in the dramatic richness of that scene in Crusoe's adventures.

Gilbert Rolfe nodded as the boy closed the book. "That's good!" he said. "I read 'Robinson Crusoe' for the first time when I was about your age, Sonnie. I'll never forget it!"

"It's a fine book!" John Kenadie agreed emphatically.

The old schoolmaster was handling the volume of verse tenderly. "I'd like mighty to hear something from this," he suggested. "Suppose you try your hand at it, John?"

And the boy, still tricked, told Gilbert Rolfe that he liked best "The Parting of Marmion and Douglas," and straightway read Sir Walter's stirring lines aloud as only a boy could, thrilled to his adventurous boy's soul by the swing and the meaning of it. There was even a pathos in his struggle with the rhythm of verse, a struggle caused by his childish ignorance that made any reading toilsome. But the music of it plainly appealed to him, and he was not content until he caught the measured cadence to his liking. And he was laughing with sheer delight when he had finished; laughing and blushing both as he looked up into Gilbert Rolfe's old eyes.

"I'm much obliged to you, John," said the schoolmaster, simply. He made no comment on the boy's reading. "Some time soon," he did say, however, "after you've been at school a while, I have one or two books I'd like to lend you. They're boys' books, and you'll enjoy them."

When Gilbert Rolfe, a half hour later, bade little Miss Sugarlump good-night, he smiled confidently in answer to the hopeful questioning of her brown eyes.

"I think, Miss Sugarlump," he said, "I think we won't have much trouble with Sonnie hereafter. It looks very much that way to me now, Miss Sugarlump!"

## VI

### THE APPLE OF CONCORD

As bravely as a boy could, who had all a boy's fear of girls in his heart, John Kenadie confronted the task which his mother had set him, the awesome task of pacifying the scornful Betty Thordike, with whom he had engaged in so dreadful a tilt at their first meeting.

He encountered her among the earliest when he arrived at school. It frightened him that this should be the case, but he began to edge towards her in a boy's shamed way. And Betty opened an indirect but effective fire on him without delay.

"Don't you just hate that new boy, John Kenadie?" she asked her girl chum, Sallie Yarbrough, as Sonnie came within earshot. "He's a perfect bully, that's what he is! I think the way he fought with Hugh Latham was just awful. And he's so quarrelsome he'll quarrel with girls, too, Sallie!"

Betty's companion cast an apprehensive glance at John Kenadie, not more than two feet from Betty's shoulder. She whispered something to the girl, who shook her tawny little head defiantly.

"I don't care if he is!" she cried. "I want

him to know just what I think of him! And I think mighty little of him, I can tell you!"

Sonnie drew out of Betty's range of fire, his soul shaking. And this was the girl to whom he must deliver an apology and one of Miss Sugarlump's biggest and juiciest apples before the day ended!

It was just the same during the noon play-hour. John Kenadie, accepted now by the other boys as a comrade in good standing because of his masterful fight with Hugh, entered the lists of the games joyously. He greatly distinguished himself, essaying the doughtiest feats of rural athletics to show the makings of a man that were in him. All the time he was hoping that Betty Thorndike saw his deeds. And she did.

"Humph! it makes me sick!" he heard Betty say as he finished a series of cart-wheel hand-springs of acknowledged brilliancy. "John Kenadie thinks he's so smart! It's disgusting to see boys so conceited about themselves."

What could he do to satisfy such a girl? A craven terror took possession of Sonnie. He found it impossible to nerve himself to the point of speaking to her, however humbly. Old Gilbert Rolfe's summons to the afternoon books was heard by him with his task still to be performed.

And here another shameful experience awaited John Kenadie. For the first time in his life he was called on to "say his lesson" before a company of strangers. It is possible that Betty's treatment

of him had in a manner robbed him of all self-poise that might have been his. But he was naturally a bashful boy. The first page of his new reader proved too much for him : his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth ; his breath fled from him ; letters became mysterious and baffling things, — he failed utterly and pathetically. And it was Betty's triumphant little laugh which he heard then ; her mocking eyes smote his faltering gaze as he strode back to his desk, hot and shamed and blushing to the ears.

When school was out the boy felt that further postponement of his task was not possible ; he simply must speak to Betty, and get his mother's injunction off his mind. Their homeward paths were the same for the first half mile. Sonnie followed Betty as she tripped away from the little schoolhouse ; he swung his basket drearily, and wondered how he was to convey its lonely apple acceptably to Miss Thorndike.

“Betty !” he essayed to call to her in a natural and unaffected manner ; but it was only a coward’s feeble cry. The girl heard it and smiled to herself.

Coming out from the shadow of the woods to where the road ran between fields, the boy closed desperately on the girl. She did not give any remotest sign of consciousness of his presence ; but he kept doggedly on, almost abreast of her, his eyes wistful as they stole a glance at her now and then.

A gentle and homeward-wending cow was approaching them along the road. Like all of her dreamful kind, she was one of the most peaceable and inoffensive of God's creatures. But she was thinking her own thoughts as she went along the quiet country highway, and, some especial reflection seeming to call for emphasis, she tossed her head thereat. It happened that Betty Thorndike was directly in front of the tossed head, and so formidable did it seem, she screamed and started back in dismay.

Upon which John Kenadie came to the rescue, placing himself between Betty and the astonished cow with the greatest intrepidity.

"She won't hurt you," said John, his voice sounding strangely in his own ears. "Come on by with me, and then she 'll keep on her own way."

Miss Betty, taking pains, however, to scurry past under John Kenadie's lee, shot another of her contemptuous glances at him.

"I ain't afraid," she remarked tartly; "cows don't hurt anybody." And again she withered her protector with her ungrateful eyes.

"They skeer girls, though," said John Kenadie wisely; then he swung his basket, in which was the propitiatory apple. There was an ominous silence.

"Say, Betty!" ventured the boy finally, pleading in his voice.

There was no reply from Miss Thorndike.

"Please, Betty Thorndike," said John Kenadie, "don't stay mad at me. I'm sorry I said you was red-haired and freckle-faced."

A storm gathered in the girl's eyes at this.

"Here's an apple I brought you," the boy continued humbly.

"I don't want your old apple!" cried Miss Betty. "You can keep it for all I care."

"It's a great big one!" tempted John, holding it out on his palm as a huckster would. "And my mother made me promise to give it to you."

The girl looked at the apple.

"And she told me I ought n't to have talked rough to you like I did," confessed John. "She says girls ain't like boys."

Betty glanced at John. He was a nice looking boy, she acknowledged in her own mind.

"And you're really and truly sorry?" she asked, saying to herself that she liked John Kenadie.

"On my word!" cried John eagerly. "Wish I may drop dead in my tracks if I ain't sorry, Betty!"

"Then I'll take the apple," said Miss Thorndike.

And she bit into it luxuriously. To his unbounded amazement, John now found himself enjoying the situation.

"We're friends this time," said the girl. "But don't you never, never do it again!"

"I won't," promised Sonnie rapturously; and

then — “ Say ! ” he announced with a boldness that astonished his own soul, “ I like you.”

Betty Thorndike dimpled at John Kenadie.

“ And your hair’s pretty,” came the further confession from Sonnie ; “ and you ain’t got but one freckle,— a little one on your nose,— and I like that.”

Whereupon there was peace between the two.

And little Miss Sugarlump never laughed more heartily in her life than when the truth of her son’s tremendous infatuation for Betty Thorndike was unwittingly revealed to her. It came, to John Kenadie’s own astonishment and indignation, when he had dutifully related to his mother the full details of the fulfillment of his task.

“ And she made friends with you ? ” asked Miss Sugarlump, deeply interested. “ She did n’t seem to stay angry after you told her you were sorry for what you had said ? ”

“ Yes ’m ; I think she made friends, ’cause she took the apple,” said John Kenadie. “ And she don’t hate me no more, mommie, ’cause she said so ; and she looked back and laughed at me, and waved her hand just this-a-way,”— and the boy gave a shamefaced imitation of the girl’s first flutter of coquetry ; it made Miss Sugarlump’s brown eyes fairly dance.

“ Now, was n’t that good of her ? ” she suggested. “ And don’t you feel better, Sonnie, because you ’ve made up with her ? ”

Sonnie's dark head was nodded with intense emphasis; then he sat silent for a time,—dreaming, with his new reader closed over his forefinger; even its literary beguilement was forgotten under the spell of Betty.

"I'm glad we're friends," he said solemnly at last. "She's awful pretty, mommie!"

It was then Miss Sugarlump laughed so irrelevantly, it seemed to John Kenadie, and she was still laughing as she stooped to hug and kiss him, pressing him to her until Betty Thorndike's adorer was nigh smothered.

"Oh, Sonnie!" she cried, her eyes gleaming with mischief,—"oh, Sonnie, she's your sweetheart!"

John Kenadie was appalled and shocked at this.

"She ain't!" he gasped, feeling that shame had fallen upon him. "She ain't any such thing, mommie, and you know it too."

But the cruel Mrs. Kenadie was still laughing as she put one finger under her son's chin and turned his blushing face up to her teasing glance. The woman was very strong in little Miss Sugarlump.

"And Sonnie's got a sweetheart!" she called down at him. "Just to think of it!—and never asked me a word about getting her! Oh, you underhanded, deceitful boy, you!"

And at this the valiant Kenadie was so wroth that he struggled mightily in his mother's grasp,

conceiving that he was being foully misdone ; but they were strong young arms about him, and refused to let him go, so that he was obliged to rest resistless against her bosom, his soul shaken with confusion. Thus they remained for a time, the little mother and her boy, until by degrees the world regained its normal impress of naturalness to John Kenadie, and he felt that it was still permissible to look life in the face ; and not a word more did Miss Sugarlump say then about the dreadful thing she had charged him with possessing, so that when she released him at last John was enabled to turn with some dignity to his reader, where were things of more serious import awaiting his attention.

Nevertheless it was good that little Miss Sugarlump had thus prepared him, as it were, because the next day at school John Kenadie's secret was discovered to all the world, and the little shock at home had strengthened him for what was to follow.

It was "Buck" Barbee, whose parents were bottom-land "squatters" of no recognized social standing, who first proclaimed to the school that Sonnie and Betty were sweethearts. It tickled Buck to the very core of his humorous soul when he himself made the discovery.

"Geminy crackey, folks!" he shouted, dancing with glee ; "git away f'om them two people! Don't you see they're spoonin' each other, and don't you know it's catchin'?"

The sentimental plight of Sonnie and Betty was too apparent to be ignored. Shouts of laughter arose at Buck's announcement.

"Git away f'om there, you Mollie Neal!" continued the facetious young swamp outlaw. "Ain't you got no sense, Mollie? You'll be makin' up to me first thing you know! It's catchin', I tell you!"

John Kenadie confronted the rejoicing Buck, blushing hotly.

"You shut up now, Buck Barbee!" he cried. "Don't get too funny, now. It may not be so funny as you think!"

"Pigoorp!" hooted Buck of the 'bottom-lands, giving the loud cry with which he called his father's hogs to him at feed time in the swamps. "Gits so mad he wants to fight right off! Git away f'om 'em, I say! They're mighty bad took with it, sho's you're bo'n, and it's catchin' wuss 'n the measles! Git away f'om 'em!"

And then the humorist was off like a shot, having had his jest at what all the world laughs at and envies. Sonnie and Betty were left alone.

"That Buck Barbee's a turrible boy!" said Betty. "Was you going to hit him, John?"

"I dunno what I'd 'a' done," answered John Kenadie. "Anyway, don't you mind what he said, Betty!"

## VII

### A POET AND A CORNFIELD SONG

ONE afternoon when school was done for the day, old Gilbert Rolfe took Sonnie home with him for a glimpse at his books and the choice of one of them as a loan for his soul's refreshment.

The boy went along at his side in perfect comradeship. Little by little he had revealed himself to the old schoolmaster, and the revelation was a wonder and delight to Gilbert Rolfe. It showed him a lad singularly after his own heart, a healthily bookish lad, instinctively worshipful of letters, full of a sweet dreaming that is entirely possible only to a boy of ardent imagination growing up in the country and loving every phase of the open life.

Sonnie picked up a stone and threw it with a practiced and easy swing at a crow which had alighted on a limb. With an angry and hoarse protest the crow took wing and found refuge in the cornfield across the road.

"That's the one bird I don't like!" said Sonnie gravely.

"Why not?" old Gilbert Rolfe asked.

"He's a thief and a liar," answered Sonnie in

all simplicity. "And he's a hypocrite. And he wishes bad luck to people!"

The schoolmaster laughed.

"You seem to have found him out pretty well!" he commented. "Do you know 'em all by character that way, Sonnie?"

"How can anybody help it, Mr. Rolfe?" inquired the boy. "Birds and dogs and horses, why, they're just like us — you come to know 'em just like you know people. And some you like and some you don't!"

Gilbert Rolfe's glance was caressing the country scene.

"I wish I could like Hugh Latham!" said Sonnie. The sequence of his thought had plainly led him to this.

The old schoolmaster turned quickly.

"You can if you want to," he replied. "It all depends on you alone whether you do or not."

"I like him when I'm away from him," said Sonnie. "But I lose my temper just the minute I get with him. Ain't that funny, Mr. Rolfe? And he's the only boy at school I can't honestly make up with after we've fallen out. I wish I could like him. And my mother wishes it, too."

"It'll be your fault if you don't," Gilbert Rolfe made answer, a keen interest alight in his eyes. "There's a reason why you should like him, or else you would n't feel drawn towards him when he is not near you. You ought to let that feel-

ing conquer the other. It comes from your heart."

Sonnie's face lighted up gladly.

"I'm going to try that way, Mr. Rolfe!" he cried. "Maybe I'll find myself liking Hugh tip-top the first thing I know!"

Gilbert Rolfe made note of this for Miss Sugar-lump's ears.

When they came to the old schoolmaster's home, the brown farmhouse of the Prewitts, with a corn-field stretching away from one side and a deep and fragrant orchard behind, Mrs. Prewitt met them.

"Well, Mr. Rolfe!" she laughed. "You didn't tell me you was going to bring company home with you!"

Gilbert Rolfe joined in her laugh.

"I wasn't certain he would come," was his reply. "But he won't bother you a bit, Mrs. Prewitt. He's a quiet, confirmed bookworm just like me!"

Mrs. Prewitt glanced at John smilingly. Then she shook hands with him when the schoolmaster told her his name.

"He don't look like a bookworm, Mr. Rolfe."

"Neither did I," retorted Gilbert Rolfe, "when I was his age!"

And at this the amused Mrs. Prewitt shook with laughter. She put great store by the schoolmaster and his innocent jests. Gilbert Rolfe and Sonnie entered the house, and the next moment the boy was deep in a fine competency of books. Sound,

old-fashioned books they were, with something precious even in the smell of them.

"They go back to my own boyhood days in Virginia," said the schoolmaster tenderly. "They're my oldest friends, Sonnie."

"They're just grand!" Sonnie cried.

And the boy was tremendously in earnest. All his bookish soul was in a blaze of interest. Gilbert Rolfe had created an epochal moment in Sonnie Kenadie's life.

"You will learn to like all of them by degrees, John," the schoolmaster said, smiling at the boy's eagerness. "And you will be welcome to read them all."

"Thanky, oh, thanky, sir!" gasped John Kenadie. "It's mighty good of you, Mr. Rolfe!"

The boy's passion amazed Gilbert Rolfe, even though the schoolmaster had already recognized John Kenadie's clear birthright of entry into the sweet world of letters. He knew Sonnie to the inmost soul now.

"Pick out the one you want the most," he laughed, "and take it home with you, John. Then you can take the next best after that. And the first thing you know there won't be any you have n't read."

"And then I'll read 'em all over again!" cried John, rejoicing.

Old Gilbert Rolfe beamed on the boy.

John Kenadie's stay would have outlasted his

welcome from any but a fellow bookman. It seemed for a time as if he could not tear himself from the schoolmaster's treasures of print. Finally, however, he turned to their owner.

"I reckon I'll take this one," he said wistfully. He held "Gulliver's Travels" in his hand for Gilbert Rolfe's judgment.

"I knew you would!" the schoolmaster laughed.

And that was the beginning of the high training of John Kenadie by Gilbert Rolfe. Another phase was reached several months afterward. Its possible meaning of fruitful development filled the schoolmaster with a secret joy and wonderment.

It was at a time when John Kenadie was under his eyes in school, the quiet afternoon hour just preceding the school's dismissal. The boy had been strangely busied with writing, still an irksome task to him because of unfamiliarity with the pen. Yet that this day's enterprise was an absorbing work could not be doubted. His dark little face was alive with interest, his eyes shone when occasionally lifted for a swift but unseeing glance through the windows into the country outside. There was an earnest thoughtfulness in them.

When school was dismissed the old schoolmaster called to John Kenadie to remain. When they were alone he stood by the boy's desk.

"What were you writing, John?" he asked quietly.

Sonnie's eyes widened at the unexpected ques-

tion, narrowing as swiftly afterwards, a sure sign of his dismay and embarrassment.

"Nothing — oh, just — just nothing, Mr. Rolfe!" he cried. "That is, it wa' n't nothing wrong, Mr. Rolfe!"

"Did I say it was?" chuckled the old schoolmaster. "But you were so hard at it, John, that it made me curious. Come, now, what was it? If it was n't wrong, why should you be afraid to tell me?"

John Kenadie laughed in sheer confusion. Then he blushed.

"Let me see what you were writing," continued Gilbert Rolfe. "If it's a secret, I won't tell anyone. I promise you I won't."

The boy smiled at the old teacher's manner.

"'T ain't a secret, Mr. Rolfe," he stammered, yet laughing. "I was — I was — well, then, I know you'll make fun of me, but I was just trying to make up a cornfield song to sorter s'prise old Uncle Shadrach with when I go home!"

By this time John's nervous fingers had drawn the paper out of his desk. Gilbert Rolfe did not offer to take it from him.

"A cornfield song?" the schoolmaster repeated questioningly. "Of course, I know that's what the negro field-hands sing going home at sundown, but I don't quite understand. Is it one old Shadrach taught you?"

"No, sir, not this one," replied John Kenadie.

"I—I wanted to see—I just kinder felt a han-kering to try and make up one for myself. Just for fun, Mr. Rolfe. I just fairly itched to do it!"

The old schoolmaster's gray head was bent understandingly.

"I know," he said gently. "I see just how you came to do it. And those that old Shadrach taught you when you were little, do I understand that you have written some of them down, too?"

The boy nodded. His embarrassment was vanishing.

"Only to see how they'd look in writing," he explained. "It seemed so great to think of their being written out that way, and they looked so fine. And it tickled Uncle Shadrach 'most into fits!"

"I should think so," agreed Gilbert Rolfe, the humor of the situation appealing to him. "And did you read them, or recite them, to old Shadrach when they were written down?"

"I sung 'em!" replied John, laughing in spite of himself. "And Uncle Shadrach declared they sounded just like sho' 'nuff songs out of a book, that way!"

"Maybe so, maybe so," commented the old schoolmaster, looking at John Kenadie with a vast partiality. "And this one that you made up yourself, John, does that go to a certain tune, too?"

"'Course it does, Mr. Rolfe!" cried the boy, almost indignantly. "'T would n't be no song if

it did n't have a tune. But I only thought up the words, not the tune. I could n't do that if I tried all my life. It 's one of Uncle Shadrach's tunes."

"And you fitted your words to old Shadrach's tune?" persisted Gilbert Rolfe, keen for discovery.  
"And they do fit, do they, John?"

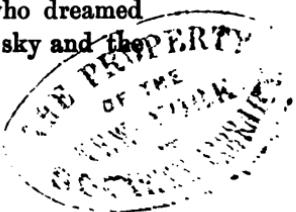
"Seems so to me," answered John Kenadie, almost wistfully. "I sorter hummed the tune to myself when I was thinking up the words, and they kep' the tune after I had 'em down."

"Try 'em now, John," suggested Gilbert Rolfe softly. "That 'll make sure of them before you surprise old Shadrach, you know. Just see if they fit the tune all right."

The boy looked startled for a moment. And then the fervor of the true craftsman possessed him and did away with his shyness. Still blushing, but sweet-voiced, he sang to the best of his ability the childish lyric which he had composed for old Shadrach's cornfield tune.

The melody was one which Gilbert Rolfe had heard through many a twilight, coming from the deep and musical throats of negroes homeward bound across the fields. It was a plaintive little air, with the minor strain so certain to be sounded in all negro singing. It had in it a wild tenderness strangely appealing to the listener's heart.

And the words? They were only a country boy's words, of course,—but a boy who dreamed dreams, who loved the fields and the sky and the



sun and the winds, and who had tried, in all faithful simplicity, to sing one of the many songs that were in his soul because of these things. And, with a true ear for music and rhythm, he had succeeded amazingly for so young and untrained a singer. Gilbert Rolfe was startled by the significance of his discovery. But he kept an impassive countenance.

"They fit the tune very smoothly," he acknowledged, when the boy's singing was done. "Tell me, Sonnie, do you like trying to make verses?"

John Kenadie's dark face was alight with eagerness.

"I just love to, Mr. Rolfe," he said simply. "It seems so fine when they come right at last, the words and the tune and the thinking. And you just can't rest till they do come right!"

The old schoolmaster again bent his head in comprehending agreement with the boy. Then, after quite a long silence—"I think, John," he ventured cautiously, "that if I were you, I would keep on with it. It's good practice, you know, even for your handwriting. And it's a pleasure to you, anyway."

The boy's dark head was nodded gladly.

"And it won't matter if you don't always use one of old Shadrach's tunes," suggested Gilbert Rolfe. "Sometimes, maybe, just a thought of your own will lead to a song. A song in words, without a tune, you know, Sonnie."

Sonnie's eyes were quick with understanding.

"And suppose you let me see what you write, always," said Gilbert Rolfe. "Just between you and me, as if I had set you a task to be done when you were in ~~the~~ humor. Would you be willing to do that, Sonnie?"

"Oh, I'd love to, Mr. Rolfe!" cried John Kenadie impetuously. The boy's very soul was in his face.

## VIII

### THE PERTURBING WAYS OF BETTY

"If you like Hugh Latham better'n you do me," John said angrily, "all you've got to do is to say so, Betty Thorndike!"

And Betty Thorndike laughed.

"If I said so," she asked, "what would you do, Connie Kenadie?"

"I'd let you have him for your sweetheart!" answered John, with what indifference of manner was possible to him.

There was a toss of Miss Betty's head.

"You'd let me?" she mocked. "Thanky, Mars' John!" — and there was a crushing assumption of submissiveness in her tone. "But if I wanted Hugh Latham for a sweetheart, I would n't have to ask you, I'd like you to know!"

"Take him, then!" cried John fiercely. "Take him. You know you want him. And I'm not going to stand in the way. I can get along without you, Betty Thorndike!"

"You can't neither," said Betty complacently. "I know what you'd do if I did!"

"What?" asked John.

"You'd die of a broken heart!" declared Betty.

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"Or you'd get reckless and throw yourself away, drinking, when you grew up. Or you'd get shot in a fight!"

"How do you know I would?" inquired Sonnie, somewhat fascinated by these romantic possibilities.

"I know. 'Cause that's what men always do when they get jilted and their hearts break," Betty instructed him. "I've heard my Aunt Lucy say so. And she broke a man's heart once!"

"Would you be sorry?" asked John gloomily. It seemed to him worth while considering these picturesque features of sweetheartsing.

"That's the way I ought to feel," confessed Betty, with some little pride; "'cause it would be me what broke your heart, you know."

John nodded. He saw that it would.

"I'd ha'nt you, when I was dead and gone," he notified Betty. "I'd come to your bed in the night-time, wringing my hands and moaning and gnashing my teeth!"

Betty's eyes widened with sudden apprehension.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself if you did!" she cried indignantly. "I never heard of a man behaving that way."

"I'd behave that way, though," persisted Sonnie. Betty regarded him fearfully. She was silent under the dread threat.

"Are you going to break my heart, Betty Thorn-

dike?" asked John Kenadie; and the erstwhile cruel Miss Thorndike burst into tears at this.

"You know I ain't!" she sobbed. "And you know I don't want Hugh Latham for my sweetheart, neither! I hate and despise him, that's what I do with him! I hate and despise him with all my mind and with all my heart and with all my soul!"

And again there was a great peace between the two.

But it was of pitifully short duration. Betty was not superior to her temperament, and Hugh Latham's lofty indifference to girls piqued her coquettish soul beyond endurance, just as it had done before she knew John Kenadie. She could not keep Hugh out of her thoughts.

"You think you're too mannish to play with girls!" she said to him scornfully, shortly after her tiff with John.

"Maybe I do," answered Hugh carelessly, "and maybe I don't."

"Yes, you do!" retorted Betty, tossing her head.

"Well, then, let's say I do," was Hugh's reply. "What about it?"

Betty sniffed at him.

"I don't blame you!" she said. "No girl could like you, anyway!"

"Oh, yes, they could," Hugh laughed. "If I wanted 'em to."

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"Well, Hugh Latham!" taunted Betty, but blushing and angry. "Of all the conceited things I ever heard! Why, you're too vain to live!"

"They'd like me all the same," said Hugh, "and you know it!"

Betty's saucy nose was tilted high.

"I don't know it!" she protested. "I don't know one girl in all this school that gives the snap of her finger for you!"

"I do, though," said Hugh calmly.

Betty laughed uncomfortably.

"You're just putting on!" she cried. "Anybody can brag!"

"I know one girl in this school that likes me, all the same," Hugh said.

"Well, then," desperately ventured Betty, "who is it?"

"It's you!" said Hugh Latham.

Betty's face went red in a moment. She was a proud little thing. It was with her head high that she confronted Hugh Latham then.

"If that's the best you can do," she made instant reply, "you're pretty bad off, I must say. I would n't wipe my feet on you!"

It was Hugh's turn to grow angry. Betty's air was contemptuous.

"You know you do!" he cried. "You can't deny it!"

Betty jeered at him.

"If you was the last boy on this earth," she

announced, " I could n't like you, Hugh Latham ! It ain't in me to like you ! "

" Why don't you leave me alone, then ? " asked Hugh, stung to the quick. " What makes you keep on fooling around me all the time for ? I don't put myself in your way any ! "

Tears of temper sprang to Betty Thorndike's eyes.

" I felt sorry for you ! " she said hotly. " You poor, homely boy, you ! None of the other girls would notice you, and I felt sorry for you. It ain't your fault that you ain't as good-looking as John Kenadie ! "

And then Hugh Latham's eyes flashed in earnest.

" I can lick John Kenadie, anyway ! " he cried passionately. " I can lick him any time he wants to fight ! "

Betty was reckless of consequences.

" You ain't never done it yet ! " she laughed. " And I'd like to see you try it, too ! But I saw him whip you, Hugh Latham, fair and square ! "

Hugh stood dumb with anger, his eyes flashing.

" You, talking about the girls liking you ! " Betty taunted. " And about your whipping John Kenadie ! Do you know what you ought to remember, Hugh Latham ? "

" What ? " asked Hugh sulkily.

" Brag 's a good dog," said Betty, " but Holdfast is a better ! That 's what you ought to remember ! "

And then she was off, laughing and jubilant. But only to run directly into sight of John Kenadie. The boy saw Hugh at the same moment. His face darkened with a boy's jealous anger. Hugh came straight towards them.

"John Kenadie!" he cried. "I told Betty I could lick you!"

"Well," said Sonnie, "that don't make it so."

Again the old smile was on his lips and his eyes were glowing. "I've whipped you once, Hugh Latham," he said, with something like a fierce gladness in his voice, "and I can do it again."

"That's a lie!" shouted Hugh madly. "Mr. Rolfe parted us."

And with this he rushed at John Kenadie.

Betty stood in the way. She was crying. Her hands touched Hugh.

"Oh, please don't fight!" she sobbed. "Please don't!"

The two boys stood glowering at each other with the girl between.

"It was my fault!" said Betty. "It was all my fault!"

The girl looked from one to the other. She was trembling with all a girl's dread of violence. Finally she turned to Hugh Latham.

"Please go away, Hugh!" she begged. "I won't tease you again. I promise you I won't. Please go away now!"

And just then Gilbert Rolfe came in view and

the imminent encounter was averted. The old schoolmaster divined from the bearing of the boys and from Betty's agitation that there had been trouble of a sort, but he wisely refrained from any comment or investigation. He was counting on nature in this matter of Hugh Latham and John Kenadie, not on any human authority.

"John," he said casually, "come along with me. There's time for a little walk before the afternoon books."

Sonnie's face softened. "Yes, sir," he replied.

As they went away together John Kenadie saw that Betty hurried from Hugh's company. It comforted him greatly.

And by the time they returned to the little schoolhouse in the clearing Sonnie's soul had regained its tranquillity. That afternoon he accompanied old Gilbert Rolfe home. It was like a benediction to go by the side of the white-haired schoolmaster through the quiet country.

John's continued attempts at poetic expression had strengthened the schoolmaster's confidence that the boy had the true gift. Shamefaced and faltering at first, they had then grown glad and satisfying to John and increasingly interesting to his teacher. The latter was lovingly gentle and patient, and keenly hopeful.

"I must take charge of your reading, now, John," he said. The boy had gone far in his schooling and it would not be long until he must

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set to work on his mother's little farm. College was, unhappily, not to be thought of. But Gilbert Rolfe was determined that his own university training should go to benefit John Kenadie. He would outwit circumstance in this.

"I've allowed you to have your own choice of reading so far," he continued. "Now it's time to see that you get the most good from it. I want you to get all you can from books, John, because that, too, will stimulate you to develop whatever talent God has given you. And I think He has given you a very rare and noble talent."

Gilbert Rolfe watched the boy closely as he spoke. The unshaken earnestness of John's face pleased him.

"Have you ever thought, John," he asked, "of what the work you have been doing, these songs which you love to write, may mean to you?"

John Kenadie did not catch the schoolmaster's drift.

"I love to do it, Mr. Rolfe," he said in entire simplicity. "That's all I have ever thought. It seems to give me more pleasure than anything else in the world,—especially when I am satisfied with what I've done. When it seems to have been done right, I mean, Mr. Rolfe."

The old schoolmaster's face lit up with a keen ardor.

"There is no higher joy in the world," he said. "All your life, John, you will be learning this

truth. It is the joy of the best-loved task done to the best of our strength. Where there is a true gift for the doing of one thing supremely well, its best doing brings the greatest happiness possible on this earth ! ”

And John Kenadie then saw the truth clearly and with deep content.

“ As you grow older,” said Gilbert Rolfe, “ it may be that you will find yourself farther and farther away from the feeling of kinship with all nature which you have now. I do not think it will be so in your case, but it has been true of many men who were acutely sensitive to such influences as boys. I hope it will not be so with you.”

John Kenadie laughed at this.

“ That will never be,” he cried. “ Why, Mr. Rolfe, I ’d sooner die than to lose that feeling and not to love the country and all the living things in it that I love now. It ’s a part of me, like my eyes that I see with, or my ears that I hear with ! ”

“ Then it will live in you always,” said Gilbert Rolfe.

And it was but a little time after this when the two friends, the old man and the boy, ceased to be teacher and pupil in the eyes of their little world. Not in the fact, however ; they were teacher and pupil afterward just as before.

Thus did John Kenadie, along the way of years, come to man’s estate, loving Betty Thorndike,

puzzled and perturbed in his soul by Hugh Latham, finding a great and growing happiness in the exercise of the gift which God had given him and Gilbert Rolfe had discerned in him and trained to fruitfulness.

## IX

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

IT greatly tickled little Miss Sugarlump when John, grown into a tall and big-framed but spare young man, left school for good and took charge of her farm with Uncle Shadrach as his lieutenant.

"I'd like to send him to college," she told old Gilbert Rolfe, wondering if he knew it would come near to breaking her heart if Sonnie should thus go away from her, "but I simply cannot do it. We just about raise enough cotton to get our living, and I've always been so deadly afraid of getting into debt and losing the farm in the end!"

"You're doing exactly right, Miss Sugarlump," replied the old schoolmaster, even though regretfully. "It would be a great thing for John to go to college, and he deserves to go, because he's a scholar by nature. But it is also necessary for him to be a farmer, and you need him on the farm here. Besides, I mean to see that he keeps up his reading and does not grow out of the habit of study. He'll not be the first farmer boy who has gained a good education outside of a college, Miss Sugarlump!"

Little Mrs. Kenadie looked gratefully at Gilbert Rolfe.

"You're mighty good to Sonnie and me," she said simply. "You've been the best friend in the world!"

"I love both of you," explained the old schoolmaster with equal simplicity. "I am a lonely man, and you and Sonnie have meant much of happiness for me. And I think John is going to make me very proud of him, Miss Sugarlump. The boy has a rare and precious gift."

"It almost hurts me, that very thing, Mr. Rolfe!" cried Miss Sugarlump, with a pretty shame in her eyes. "Do you know, I can't think of Sonnie in that way at all! It seems to me that you alone have seen the real John Kenadie. That I, his mother, am blind to him except just the mere fact that he is my son and that I love him. And yet I am proud — oh, so proud, that he is a poet and that he may come to be known as one. And all the time, in spite of this, it is as if I were doubting it, as if I could not believe it, and only for the reason that he is my son and not some other woman's son! Is n't it strange, Mr. Rolfe?"

The old schoolmaster laughed.

"It is so natural, Miss Sugarlump," he said, his eyes twinkling with the human humor of the truth, "that you will never outgrow it. If John should actually become famous, it will make no difference to you. He will simply be your dearly beloved son; the fame will seem something vague and unreal to you. And this is the truth, too, Miss Su-

garlump — it is best for any man that there are some who love him in this way. That is the heart of his life, the homely and contenting part of it. It is what he turns to from the struggle and the strain of his work, no matter how dear his work may be to him. In John's case, Miss Sugarlump, his truest happiness will always rest with you — and with his wife ! ”

“ His wife ! ” repeated little Miss Sugarlump softly. “ You have no idea how strange that sounds to me, Mr. Rolfe ! ”

Gilbert Rolfe's glance was grimly quizzical.

“ If I were to make a guess,” he said dryly, “ I should say that the maiden name of John's wife is Betty Thorndike ! ”

“ You think he loves Betty ? ” asked Mrs. Kenadie quickly.

“ I am almost sure of it,” answered the schoolmaster. “ And I think he has loved her since they were little children. There are such cases, you know, Miss Sugarlump.”

“ I know,” said Mrs. Kenadie, smiling to herself. “ And does Betty love him, Mr. Rolfe ? ”

“ Now, Miss Sugarlump,” replied the old schoolmaster, chuckling at the question, “ that takes me beyond my depth. What man can read a woman, especially a mischievous little flirt like Betty ? But this I have often thought, and we will probably learn very quickly when Betty comes home from her Memphis school — she will love either John Kenadie or Hugh Latham.”

"Oh, Mr. Rolfe!" cried little Miss Sugarlump, her eyes darkening with apprehension, "if that should be — if that should be — that they both are in love with Betty! God forbid such a thing!"

"Miss Sugarlump," asked the schoolmaster quietly, "are n't you frightening yourself now about nothing? There has been nothing to awaken that old dread of yours for a long time now. John and Hugh are on fairly good terms with each other. Don't you remember that they were almost friends during the last year they were at school? — that they played in the same games and had no more quarrels? Why, Miss Sugarlump, it is just as if the old evil that you feared had no existence but in our imaginations. And they are both grown now, and with no remote likelihood of ever hearing its story. Miss Sugarlump, it seems to me that all danger is past!"

Mrs. Kenadie seemed to regain composure.

"You must be right," she answered with a sigh of relief. "I feel sure myself, most of the time, that what I feared will never come into their lives. Yet it will frighten me, Mr. Rolfe, if Hugh and John should both happen to fall in love with Betty!"

"I do not know that Hugh will," said Gilbert Rolfe. "I have never noticed that he cared for her as John does. And as for Betty's coquetting with the two of them, what does that signify, Miss Sugarlump? Only that Betty loves to be admired, and that John and Hugh are both good-looking

boys, and that she makes eyes at them because it is her way. And even at that, Miss Sugarlump, she has thus far made eyes at Hugh in vain, the little fibbertigibbet! He doesn't seem to care for any girl."

"I hope he will never care for Betty," said Miss Sugarlump, "if Sonnie is going to care for her!"

"Amen to that!" cried Gilbert Rolfe, with a wry little smile on his lips. "Because that would mean sorrow to one of the boys, and such a sorrow sometimes lasts for a lifetime!"

Miss Sugarlump was about to make some reply to this when she heard John and old Shadrach enter the yard, returning from the fields, and go towards the stable with the horses released from ploughing. Excusing herself to the comprehending old schoolmaster, she hurried out to welcome her home-coming son. It was now one of the dear delights of her life, this twilight home-coming of John, tired and hungry and always glad for a sight of her. It was second in pridefulness only to Miss Sugarlump's joy of a morning when she saw John Kenadie start out to his day's business about the farm, the master of her modest possessions. In a few moments they returned to Gilbert Rolfe, whose grim and steady eyes rested on them with deep approval.

John Kenadie had one arm around little Miss Sugarlump's waist. He stood head and shoulders above her, a sunburned and wholesome young

farmer, strong of limb and yet with the slenderness of early manhood making deceptively unnoticeable the broad and sound firmness of his frame. The height of the Kenadies was his, a pioneer breed which considered any man a "runt" who did not attain to "five foot ten in his stockin' feet." His brown eyes still held their old dreamfulness and occasional quaint solemnity, but they were steady eyes as well, with good masculine resoluteness in them and the honest content that comes from healthy work. They lightened at sight of the old schoolmaster.

"Why, Mr. Rolfe!" he cried, leaving his mother's side and coming forward with gladly outstretched hand; "but it does me good to see you! I think mother wanted to surprise me a-purpose. She never breathed a word of your being here!"

Little Mrs. Kenadie confessed through her very confusion.

"I meant to tell you, Sonnie," she said, her eyes twinkling at old Gilbert Rolfe meanwhile. "It was in my thoughts all the time! But we came in before I had the chance!"

The schoolmaster chuckled again.

"There it is!" he commented. "I'm a good enough first fiddle when you're not around, John. But it's second fiddle the minute you're in sight — and a mighty squeaky old second fiddle at that!"

John and his mother laughed at Gilbert Rolfe's

reproaching. They knew well how the old teacher relished his joke in the house of friendly comfort.

"I saw Hugh Latham to-day, mother," John called from his room, whither he had gone to wash his face and brush his hair. "He told me to tell you that Mrs. Poindexter was coming to see you to-morrow — at least she was talking about it, he said."

"Did he, Sonnie?" Miss Sugarlump rejoined, casting a happy look at Gilbert Rolfe. "Well, I'll be mighty glad to see her if she does come. And where did you see Hugh?"

"He was going into L'Anguille," answered John Kenadie, spluttering in the water. "Passed along the road just as I got to that end of the field and called to me as he went by."

"Did you have any talk with him?" asked little Mrs. Kenadie.

"Only that, mother," said John. "He was in a hurry and I was busy and so that was all."

"Well, I'm real sorry I did n't know you were going to see him," Miss Sugarlump remarked. "I'd have had you ask Hugh to Sunday dinner. I like to have him here now and then, Sonnie."

John Kenadie laughed easily. Then he came into the sitting-room again, his sun-tanned skin glowing from soap and water.

"I should say you did, mother!" he commented. "I declare, Mr. Rolfe, sometimes I think she's in

love with Hugh Latham ! You ought to see how affectionate she is to him, Mr. Rolfe ! It fairly drives me away from where they are — I 've never been able to cotton to Hugh much, myself."

His two hearers exchanged a swift glance at this.

" I thought you liked Hugh pretty well," said the schoolmaster.

John was slow to reply..

" Oh, I reckon I do," he said at last. " Only he seems to try my temper, some way or other. We 're not made to gee together, we two. But mother, she 's right at home with Hugh like as if it were me ! "

" That 's all right, John," smiled Gilbert Rolfe. " Miss Sugarlump has a weakness for coddling people. And Hugh 's been a pet of hers since he was a lonely little boy at school. Don't you remember ? "

John laughed at the question.

" And Hugh and I have been quarreling and fighting ever since ! " he answered. The old bewilderment came into his eyes.

" You have n't, any such thing ! " Miss Sugarlump cried quickly, as if resenting the thought. " You and Hugh have n't had a disagreement for so long, I don't remember when ! "

" That 's so, mother," confessed John Kenadie. He seemed relieved by the realization of this fact. In another moment he was talking with Gilbert

Rolfe about a book they had been reading together, a study of English literature from the old teacher's library. John's ardor in the discussion filled Miss Sugarlump with an exceeding pride. It comforted her, too, as seeming to indicate how lightly he was stirred now by thought of Hugh Latham. She sat through the bookish conference in great content.

When Gilbert Rolfe had gone, resisting little Mrs. Kenadie's solicitations to stay for supper on the plea that he had certain school work to prepare for the morrow, the mother and son remained on the veranda from which they had seen the schoolmaster depart. It was still quite light, although the sun had set.

"Do you ever hear any news of Betty Thorndike, Sonnie?" asked Miss Sugarlump softly.

John Kenadie flushed and laughed.

"Oh, yes, mother," he answered finally. "I see 'Squire Thorndike now and then in town, you know. And he always has something to say about Betty."

"I reckon so," laughed Miss Sugarlump frankly. "I reckon he just has to say something about her to get rid of you, Sonnie!"

And then John echoed the laugh.

"You reckon entirely too much, mother!" he said, stooping to kiss Mrs. Kenadie on the very crown of her head. "I know what you're thinking of this very minute! But I have got some

news of Betty, after all. She's coming home soon!"

Miss Sugarlump noticed the gladness in John's voice.

"Betty thought a heap of you, Sonnie," she said quietly. "You must go to see her when she gets home. I like Betty, myself!"

John's laugh was suspiciously boisterous now.

"You're mighty cunning, are n't you, mother?" he asked, his face red under the sunburn. "But maybe Betty will have more to say in all this than you or I. She may be counting on somebody else coming to see her!"

"She never liked anybody else better than you!" Miss Sugarlump cried indignantly. "Who would she be counting on now?"

"How can I tell?" John retorted. "Maybe on Hugh for all I know. Betty used to have a sort of weakness for him at school. She might prefer him to me, mother!"

And there was a ring of jealousy in the words.

Before Miss Sugarlump could reply, John moved to the open steps of the veranda and was gazing down the road.

"There's somebody coming up from town," he said.

Miss Sugarlump joined him.

"Maybe it's Hugh," she suggested, "just going home now."

The two stood watching.

"If it is he," continued Miss Sugarlump, "I'm going out to the gate to speak to him. And it is, I'm sure, Sonnie!"

Then she went down the walk to the gate.

"I'm not so certain it's Hugh," said John. "That's not his horse, mother. No, it is n't he, mother. Why, it's a stranger!"

The figure they were watching was now drawing close.

Mrs. Kenadie's face grew white in the dusk.

The stranger came nearer. He was a man of about forty, and gray.

"Good-evenin' to you!" he said politely.

Little Miss Sugarlump's trembling hand rested on the fence weakly.

"Good-evenin' to you!" repeated the stranger. "Can you tell me"—and then he stopped suddenly.

"It is Miss Sugarlump!" he cried. "Lord bless me, I could n't hardly believe it when I heard you was livin' in this part of the country!"

He had dismounted and his hands were outstretched.

"Don't you remember me, Miss Sugarlump?" he asked. "You have n't forgotten Hamp Crenshaw, that was raised with you in Kentucky, have you? Why, it's good for sore eyes just to look at you again, Miss Sugarlump! Won't you tell me howdy?"

Little Mrs. Kenadie made an inarticulate utterance.

There was a pitiful fear in her brown eyes. John Kenadie was confronting the stranger, a smile on his lips. It seemed good that one of his mother's old Kentucky friends should come to them. Miss Sugarlump saw the smile. Then she spoke.

"Howdy, Hamp," she said, her voice shaking.  
"Who would ever have thought to see you here!"

And the next moment John Kenadie was calling for old Shadrach to take the stranger's horse to the stable. His face was alight with hospitable gladness.

Little Miss Sugarlump touched the stranger's sleeve with shaking fingers. Sonnie was still calling to the old negro.

"For pity's sake, Hamp!" she whispered,  
"whatever you do, don't speak one word of that awful thing! I have kept it from him, from John yonder, all his life!"

And then they passed into the house.

## X

### FACE TO FACE

"Miss SUGARLUMP," said Hamp Crenshaw, "it ain't right."

Mrs. Kenadie's eyes were angrily defiant.

"I knew you'd say that," she replied. "It's what you all would say."

"It ain't fair," retorted Crenshaw, "to the dead."

"It's fair to the living," Miss Sugarlump said. "It saves them."

"If John Kenadie was kin to me," said the strange Kentuckian, "I would be ashamed for him ever to come face to face with Hugh Latham, the way you've raised him!"

"He comes face to face with him every day nearly," answered little Mrs. Kenadie proudly. "They have grown up together, and they are here in L'Anguille together now."

Astonishment sprang into Crenshaw's face.

"Miss Sugarlump Kenadie!" he cried. "You tell me that those two boys are both here, grown to be men, and that they don't know the truth?"

Miss Sugarlump bowed her head.

There was a strange resentment in Hamp Crenshaw's eyes. They rested on little Miss Sugar-

lump's bowed head with pity and yet with reproving.

"So help me God," he muttered. "It's a sin. It's a sin."

Miss Sugarlump answered swiftly.

"No, Hamp," she said. "The other was a sin, and this is the way to escape the sin. The other was a sin, and all you folks know it in your hearts. But you won't face the truth. You'd rather let the sin live on."

"What sort of boy is John?" asked Hamp Crenshaw.

Mrs. Kenadie's face paled.

"He's just the sort of boy that your mischief would work with like so much poison!" she replied. "Does that satisfy you, Hamp?"

"I'm glad he's that kind," was the comment. "I like him for it!"

Little Miss Sugarlump laughed bitterly.

"That's a man all over!" she cried. "They have no feeling for the woman!"

Hamp Crenshaw shook his head sadly.

"It ain't that," he said. "Miss Sugarlump, I've known you since you was a little girl, and you know I've been sorry for you from the bottom of my heart. But you're doin' wrong now. There was two ways to raise your son John. You've raised him the wrong way. If he's the right sort of boy, to my thinkin' he'd never forgive you if he knew what you've done!"

Mrs. Kenadie spoke calmly. "He'll never know!" she said.

"He ought to know," replied Crenshaw.

The man was a picturesque type: plainly bred in the open, with the mark of the mountains on him, tall, easy of carriage, with keen and fearless eyes, a vague suggestion of roving recklessness in his face and manner. It was evident that he cherished a very hearty and homely liking for little Miss Sugarlump.

"Anyway," he said, "it kain't be possible that you've taken the other boy, Hugh, to raise, Miss Sugarlump. You have n't done that, have you?"

"No, Hamp, I have n't," Mrs. Kenadie answered, wistfulness in her voice. "But it's what I ought to have done."

Crenshaw laughed, almost angrily, tossing his thick hair back.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "Good Lord!"

"Hugh has been raised by a distant cousin who never even knew his folks," explained Miss Sugarlump. "They came here after we did. It frightened me at first. But I am not afraid any more."

"I'd like to see him," said Hamp Crenshaw. "It might make me understand what you've done, Miss Sugarlump. I'd like to see him."

"When are you going away?" asked Mrs. Kenadie suddenly.

"I'm goin' away to-morrow night," came the answer. "I'm a rollin' stone, Miss Sugarlump,

just driftin' around like, and I've got no business to keep me here or bring me here. You know my kind, Miss Sugarlump."

"Will you give me your sacred word," asked little Mrs. Kenadie, "that you won't let on there's any connection between Hugh and us? You won't even hint that we come from the same part of Kentucky? You won't make any sign of knowing anything about Hugh or his folks?"

Crenshaw divined Miss Sugarlump's purpose. He nodded his head.

"I'll promise you that, Miss Sugarlump," he said. "I would n't do anything to bring trouble to you, and you know it."

Little Mrs. Kenadie's face softened. "I do know it, Hamp," she said. "All I'm afraid of comes from the old feeling that made me leave Kentucky. It's on the boys' account, Hamp. I want to save them!"

The man made no reply.

"Hugh's cousin will be here to-morrow," said Miss Sugarlump. "She's coming to see me. Her name is Mrs. Poindexter, and she's been a good mother to Hugh. God knows I love her for it! You can stay and see Hugh then, Hamp. He'll bring her here. And I want you to stay, anyway. I am glad to see you, Hamp, after all, even if I did n't seem so!"

"I knew that, Miss Sugarlump," replied Crenshaw quietly.

And then he turned to look at John, entering.

All through the evening the visitor talked with Miss Sugarlump and studied her son. The young man seemed to exert a fascination over his mind. Yet it was a critical study. It was plain that Hamp Crenshaw was measuring Sonnie from some rude standard of his own. When the time came to retire for the night he turned to little Mrs. Kenadie, laughing.

"John and I'll just sit and confab a little longer, if you say so, Miss Sugarlump," he suggested. "I'd like to, because I — because I knew his daddy so well in old times!"

Miss Sugarlump's face grew a shade paler.

"No, Hamp," she said firmly. "You're tired, and so is Sonnie, and you'd both better go to bed. I'll take you to your room now."

And when that was done little Miss Sugarlump called John Kenadie to her own room and kept him there, talking almost feverishly until she felt sure her guest would be asleep. Then she kissed John good-night, her lips quivering.

Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter was in high feather when she arrived at Mrs. Kenadie's the following day. They had been warm friends now for some years, and Mrs. Poindexter boasted truthfully that she was a good friend if she was anybody's friend at all. Hugh came with her, though he was again bound for L'Anguille, and would wait for the

midday dinner before doing his errand in the town. John was at his ploughing in a distant field when they arrived.

"Land sakes, Mr. Crenshaw!" said Mrs. Poindexter, when little Miss Sugarlump had introduced her masculine guest, "I wish you had known Hugh's folks as well as Miss Sugarlump's in Kentucky. I'd like to talk with somebody who knew 'em, just for Hugh's sake."

Miss Sugarlump's eyes were quick to warn Hamp Crenshaw.

"I wish I did, Mrs. Poindexter," replied the Kentuckian, flushing as he spoke. "But we come from a different part of the State, you see."

"Yes, I know," agreed Mrs. Poindexter. "I was just wishing, that's all. And it makes mighty little difference, anyway, because Hugh has n't got any folks back there. I'm his closest kin, Mr. Crenshaw."

Hamp Crenshaw studiously avoided looking at Mrs. Kenadie.

"Yes 'm," he made answer. "Miss Sugarlump was tellin' me about you."

Hugh Latham was standing silently to one side.

Something of the same fascination that had been apparent in the stranger's study of John Kenadie was now in his eyes as he surveyed Hugh Latham. Miss Sugarlump and Mrs. Poindexter were exchanging a few words and Hamp Crenshaw faced Hugh. The boy had grown into a handsome, care-

less man, his blue eyes full of daring, his face quick to light up with a laugh, his yellow hair waving back from his brow and temples.

"Good Lord!" said Hamp Crenshaw suddenly. "If you ain't the livin' image of" — and then he pulled himself together, red with confusion. His sudden words had silenced the two women.

"Never saw such a likeness between strangers," the man said, tossing back his iron-gray hair as Mrs. Poindexter looked at him. "He's so much like an old friend of mine, yes 'm, Mrs. Poindexter, a fellow named Steve Danforth, that it sorter surprised me! Ain't it curious, sometimes, how strangers can resemble each other?"

Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter lifted her hands and smote them together and laughed.

"I give you my word, Mr. Crenshaw," she cried, "I thought you had suddenly recollected knowing Hugh's folks! That's 'cause I've got an old likeness of his father's, and Hugh might have sat for it himself, the resemblance is so strong. Lawdy me, but I'm real disappointed!"

Hamp Crenshaw made some stumbling rejoinder, and then little Miss Sugarlump took charge of the conversation. She seemed somewhat excited by her duties as a hostess, and her talk was feverishly animated. It pleased Mrs. Poindexter to notice her brightened eyes and alert manner.

"It just does you good to have company, Miss Sugarlump," she said. "I never saw anybody get

.stirred up as quick as you do. Your friends ought to come to see you mighty often, I declare!"

Miss Sugarlump's brown eyes twinkled at Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter. "Why don't you set the example then, Mrs. Poindexter?" she asked. "You are about the worst of them all for not coming to see me."

Mrs. Poindexter's hands were lifted again, but only in protest.

"Now, that ain't fair and friendly, Miss Sugarlump!" she cried. "You know me too well for that. I'm the greatest home-body in the world, and I get here to see you oftener than I get anywhere else."

"I believe you do, Mrs. Poindexter," confessed little Miss Sugarlump, "and I wish it was oftener. But I just could n't resist jabbing you that once! And you ought to go about more than you do."

Mrs. Poindexter laughed and clapped her hands. "If you'd say that to my husband," she replied, "he'd cut your acquaintance. He thinks I'm getting wild and frisky if I go to revival and camp-meeting twice a year! But I've done told you all about that man's ways, Miss Sugarlump."

"Aunt Mary Lorena," said Hugh Latham, "I think I'll drive into town and get those things you wanted, and then come back. I can do it before dinner time."

Hamp Crenshaw started at the sound of Hugh's voice. In spite of his studied composure he glanced

swiftly at Miss Sugarlump, a meaning in his eyes which she could not misinterpret. But neither Mrs. Poindexter nor Hugh noticed the movement.

"Now maybe that would be best, Hugh," responded Mrs. Poindexter; "and there's no reason why you should n't be back here in good time. So go along with you, honey! But mind now" (and there was a sudden significance in her tone), "don't you get to frolicking with those wild young men 'round the stores, Hugh. Remember what I told you!"

Hugh Latham blushed hotly at these words, casting a strange little glance of embarrassment and apologetic pleading at Miss Sugarlump; then, with a word or two in veiled reply to Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter, he went out, and a moment later they heard him drive away towards town.

"There's just one thing I'm afraid of about Hugh," said Mrs. Poindexter, her eyes a bit troubled, "and I might as well say it right out: he's a good and affectionate-hearted boy; but sometimes he gets reckless and wants to drink too much. It's bad company that does it. There's too much whiskey down in L'Anguille, anyway, and Hugh's always tempted to drink when he goes there. But I'm going to see to it, if I can, that he does n't get into the habit,—and he minds me like a child as long as he keeps away from L'Anguille."

Hamp Crenshaw nodded his head as Mrs. Poindexter spoke. Somehow it seemed as if her words

confirmed some expectation of his own. Little Miss Sugarlump's face was full of a keen sorrow.

"Poor Hugh!" she cried. "And it may not be his fault, Mrs. Poindexter, either,—sometimes that's born in a man's blood, you know. Poor Hugh! It makes me feel tenderly towards him just to hear it!"

"I wonder if that could be the case with Hugh?" mused Mrs. Lorena Poindexter. "But there!—that's the very trouble I always run against. I don't know anything about his folks."

Neither Mrs. Kenadie nor Hamp Crenshaw made any reply to this.

And when Hugh Latham returned from L'An-guille there was a noticeable recklessness in his bearing and a smell of liquor on his breath. It was not lost on Hamp Crenshaw that little Miss Sugarlump seemed all the more attentive to Hugh, and solicitous that he should feel her friendliness for him. There was a deep sadness in her sweet brown eyes. She would not mind even when Hugh at dinner bantered John not a little, all too quick to laugh in a half-angry way when the latter retorted in a similar vein. They were not much more than boys, after all, Miss Sugarlump seemed to imply.

Hamp Crenshaw studied first one and then the other quietly.

## XI

### THE ACE OF CLUBS

"I SAY, John!" cried Hugh after dinner. His face was flushed and unsteady.

"What?" asked John.

It was Saturday,—which is an inviolate half-holiday in the L'Anguille lowlands, the negro workers on the cotton plantations crowding into town to trade at the stores.

"Let's take Hamp Crenshaw down to the L'Anguille River," continued Hugh. "It'll pass the time; and we can show him how to handle a dug-out, if he don't know already."

"I'm a mountain man," said Crenshaw. "You young fellows can show me lots of things on the river, I reckon."

"Bully!" commented Hugh. "What do you say, John? Shall we go?"

"I'm willing," said John, "if Hamp would like it."

"It's agreeable to me," replied the stranger. He appeared to relish the prospect of having a little time alone with the two young men. Miss Sugar-lump's face wore an uneasy expression, but there was no excuse for protest on her part; and the

three men set out for the L'Anguille, which was only about half a mile distant down the riverside slope of Crowley's ridge. They turned directly from the road skirting the fields and went downward through the woods.

Hardly had they left the open road when Hugh Latham, with a boyish laugh, pulled a flask from his pocket.

"Take a dram, Hamp," he cried, holding it out to the older man as he spoke. "I just felt sure you'd be dry, so I brought this back from town with me. It's good stuff."

"It is, eh?" laughed Hamp Crenshaw. "Well, then, Hugh, if you say so, I'll just hit it once for sociability's sake. That's my weakness, you know, —good liquor is. I wa'n't raised in old Kentucky for nothin'."

"Good for you!" shouted Hugh boisterously. And Hamp Crenshaw took a mighty draught from the flask, smacking his lips afterwards.

"Now it's your turn, John," urged Hugh, receiving the flask from the Kentuckian and offering it to John Kenadie. "Drink hearty, and then I'll take my turn at it. Don't be afraid! —there's plenty of it."

John lifted the flask to his lips, and almost equaled Hamp Crenshaw's libation,—it was the L'Anguille way. And then Hugh Latham took his share, a friendly "Here's looking at you!" preceding the drink. He wiped his lips with a keen

relish, his eyes gleaming, and slipped the flask back in his pocket.

"You Arkansas fellows don't object to your toddy, do you?" asked Hamp Crenshaw chaffingly. He had watched the two with a curious look in his eyes as they drank together.

"By hokey!" said Hugh, laughing noisily. "Come to think of it, both of us are half Kentucky, Hamp,—born in Kentucky and raised in Arkansas, John and me both. Now, that's funny when you come to think of it, ain't it, Hamp?"

"Funny?" repeated Hamp Crenshaw queerly. "You can bet your bottom dollar it's funny, Hugh! You and John both here! Well, funny ain't the word for it."

His manner was suggestive of some hidden meaning, but neither Hugh nor John noticed it. A quiet thoughtfulness which always came to John in the woods had now taken possession of him. Hugh, however, was plainly feeling the effect of the day's drinking.

"Say, Hamp Crenshaw," he cried suddenly, "you ought to be a pretty good pistol shot, I should think. How about it?"

"I'm pretty fair," the other answered quietly.

"Well, say now," said Hugh, "let's all take a shot and see how we compare with one another. I've got my pistol with me, and I'll just stick a card in the bark of a tree and we'll try our hands at it. What do you say?"

"Suits me," laconically replied Crenshaw. "But I'll use my own gun, if it's all the same to you."

"That's all right," was the friendly rejoinder. "How is it with you, John? Got your pistol? No? Well, then, you and I'll use mine against Hamp's. Wait till I stick up this ace o' clubs."

Crenshaw reached under his coat and drew his pistol, laughingly, as Hugh Latham stepped off thirty paces and fastened a card against the brown bark of a hickory. It made a good target, the white showing clear, with the little black ace-spot in its centre.

"You shoot first, Hamp," he said.

The words were hardly spoken when the report from Crenshaw's pistol rang through the silent woods: a swift upward and then downward sweep of the arm, with no pause for the aim. The bullet cut the upper point of the club-ace.

"That's a good shot!" cried Hugh. "But I'm going to beat it!"

"Not to-day, Hugh," said Crenshaw. "You're whiskey nervous."

Nettled at this remark, Hugh Latham fired, almost as quickly as had the speaker. His bullet struck the card, but an inch away from the black spot. He cursed as he saw the little round hole made by it. Then he handed his pistol to John Kenadie.

"You think you're something of a crack shot,"

he said, a touch of anger in his voice. "Now show what you can do!"

And John dropped the weapon to a level and fired.

"Missed the card, by George!" cried Hugh.

"In a horn I did!" retorted John Kenadie.  
"Go and look at it!"

Hamp Crenshaw laughed in a curious way as he accompanied Hugh to the tree. The third bullet had pierced the black club-ace fair and even.

"Say!" called back Hamp Crenshaw from the hickory, "that's pretty fair quick-shootin', John!"

"He prides himself on it!" commented Hugh resentfully. "He's got the trick of it, and he's always practicing!"

"It's all practice," answered John, laughing, "and there's no use handling a pistol unless you handle it right!"

Hugh was plainly put out. "Well, let's take a drink!" he suggested a bit unsteadily, producing his flask.

"No more for me," replied Hamp Crenshaw. "I like the stuff too well to fool with it unless I mean to go on a jamboree. And I've got to face Miss Sugarlump again directly, so I draw out this time."

"None for me, Hugh," said John Kenadie.

"Pshaw, you fellows!" protested Hugh.  
"You're not game!"

And then he drank alone.

Hamp Crenshaw was watching him in some amusement.

"Let me give you a piece of advice, Hugh," he said quietly. "Some men shoot steadier with whiskey in 'em and some don't. You're one of the kind that don't."

"I reckon that's so!" answered Hugh. His face flushed even more deeply as he spoke. "I can sure beat that first shot of mine!"

Then, with a little bravado in his bearing, he whirled quickly, threw out his arm, and pulled the trigger of the pistol which John had returned to him. Hamp Crenshaw laughed again. The card was not hit.

"That's what I told you," he said. "You're one of the kind that kain't drink if you want to shoot straight!"

It was evident as they went on down to the river bank that Hugh was greatly chagrined by his poor exhibition of marksmanship. In conjunction with the liquor it made him aggressive and irritable. But his companions were in a thorough good-humor and not inclined to banter him, so that his discomfiture gradually wore off.

There were two "dug-out" canoes, belonging to John Kenadie and old Shadrach, moored to the bank. Hugh stepped into one, balancing himself as if on eggs, and cast off, seating himself with the one short, broad-bladed oar poised in both hands for its stroke on either side of the boat.

" You take Hamp in with you, John," he called out, " and we 'll go across to the swamp side of the river! "

With Hamp Crenshaw carefully placed in the stern of the trembling little canoe, John Kenadie put out into the deep and swift, though narrow, L'Anguille, speeding the dug-out after the Indian fashion, with quick strokes of the oar, first on one side of the boat and then on the other.

" Gemini whiz!" laughed Hamp Crenshaw. " This blamed old hollow log 's as nervous as a thoroughbred colt! "

" Sit easy! " answered John, laughing in return. " You can capsize 'em by winking your eye if you ain't careful! "

Hugh had recognized an opportunity to recover his lost prestige. He was an admirable boatman, renowned, even on the L'Anguille, a stream that bred masterly canoeists, for his skill and grace. He made his dug-out dart here and there like a swallow, circling around John and Hamp Crenshaw and then speeding far ahead to return as swiftly. His use of the paddle was a wonder for supple grace and certainty of stroke.

" This is where you 're at home, Hugh! " Hamp Crenshaw shouted to him from John's boat. " You 're a heap sight better with a paddle than a pistol! "

" I 'm all right with a pistol, too! " Hugh answered quickly. " This ain't my day to shoot, that 's all! "

"I hope he 's sober when his day does come to shoot!" commented Hamp Crenshaw in a low tone. "That's a man that ought never to touch a drop of liquor. It gets right on to his nerves!"

After a little time spent on the edge of the gloomy swamps, the richest cotton lands in the world, the three put back across the L'Anguille. There was a high bank above where they left the dug-outs, and there they rested on the grass.

When Hugh Latham produced his flask for the third time, Hamp Crenshaw laughed at him openly.

"Confound your fool hide!" he said. "I'll take a drink with you now, just to get rid of that stuff! You've got no business takin' chances with it, Hugh!"

And he was as good as his word, taking a copious drink, that left but the smallest apology of a dram for Hugh. John again declined to drink, explaining that the first had been enough for him. Hugh was well under the influence of the liquor.

"Blame you two fellows!" he cried, but with his angry eyes turned on John Kenadie. "You've got no fun in you! John, here, is a regular mammy's boy — ain't you, John?"

John Kenadie's resentment of the contempt in Hugh's tone was quick and hot.

"Oh, I reckon not!" he answered, just the touch of a smile parting his lips. "I can hold my own with fellows anywhere near my size, I think, Hugh!"

Hugh Latham had risen, the quarrelsomeness of half-intoxication in his glance. He was swinging the empty flask in his hand.

"I don't believe you can hold your own with me!" he said unpleasantly. "I can put you on your back right here!"

John Kenadie rose quickly at the words. Hugh turned with a laugh and made a step to the edge of the bank, swinging the flask at arm's length, and hurling it far out into the L'Anguille. Then he turned swiftly to face John.

And as he did so the unstable ground, cut out below by the swift insweep of the river, gave way beneath him and he fell headlong to the water, his head striking the jagged end of a dead tree projecting halfway down the bank.

Hamp Crenshaw and John sprang to the edge of the crumbling earth as Hugh disappeared. He came up some distance away, in the deep grasp of the L'Anguille current, his face covered with blood, his arms striking upward blindly and uselessly.

"He's hurt!" cried John Kenadie at the sight. A sudden tenderness for Hugh, inexplicable to him, connected in some strange way with thought of Miss Sugarlump, swept over him. He loved Hugh for that one instant of time. "He's hurt!" John cried to Hamp Crenshaw.

And then he had flung off his coat and dived from the high bank straight out into the river, clearing the snag upon which Hugh had struck.

Hamp Crenshaw saw Hugh come to the surface and go down for the second time. John was swimming in the right direction, with splendid strokes that told of his strength and skill in the water. As Hugh came up gasping and plainly drowning John was almost within arm's reach of him. Again he went down.

But John followed him like a flash, disappearing with a mighty forward movement of unerring directness. A moment later he reappeared, using his right arm only, his left hand firmly grasping Hugh Latham by the hair. And it was but a little space after that when he had borne in shoreward to where there was a shelving bank, dragging the almost unconscious Hugh with him. Hamp Crenshaw was there to give him a hand.

"By the eternal God!" the Kentuckian whispered as the two came into safety, "if this don't break the record I'm a liar!"

And when they had all arrived home and little Miss Sugarlump heard Hamp Crenshaw's tale of the saving of Hugh's life by John, she threw her arms around the two as they stood side by side, Hugh still white and with blood on his face, and broke into a passionate flood of tears.

"Oh, God!" said Miss Sugarlump, "dear God, I thank Thee for this day! It is the sign for which I have prayed so long! I thank Thee, oh, dear God, for making John save Hugh's life!"

None but Hamp Crenshaw paid any heed to

little Miss Sugarlump's cry. That night, as he went away, she laughed at him.

"I have done wisely," she said. "The old sin is wiped out now!"

Hamp Crenshaw shook his head doggedly when he had gone.

"It ain't natural!" he said. "It ain't natural!"

## XII

### THE HOME-COMING OF BETTY

ON the very day John Kenadie rode into L'An-guille to meet and welcome Betty Thorndike, returning from her Memphis school, old Gilbert Rolfe came to him with the proud news that certain of his poems were soon to appear in the pages of a famous Eastern magazine.

The schoolmaster's delight was touching to witness. It was a daring venture of his, the sending of John's countryside songs to the highest authority in American letters. His heart beat fast when he thus put them to the test. But he had not been at fault. They were worthy.

"Do you know what it means, John Kenadie?" he cried, laughing and wringing John's hand. "It means that they know you to be a poet. It is the best magazine in this country; the most careful and the most discriminating. There is no more trying ordeal for your work than to satisfy their judgment. I have not been mistaken in you, John Kenadie!"

John Kenadie's grip of Gilbert Rolfe's hand thrilled with joy and pride. But his first words brought a twinkle to the old schoolmaster's eyes.

“ And Betty comes home to-day ! ”

Gilbert Rolfe laughed afresh at this unconscious confession.

“ If that is n’t a poet’s way ! ” he commented. “ Always a Betty in his thoughts at such a moment ! Betty, indeed ! As if she cared very much whether you were a poet or not ! It’s John Kenadie, the good-looking young sweetheart, she’s thinking about ! I’m ashamed of you, John ! ”

The young man stood blushing and confused.

“ Well, never mind ! ” continued the humble old lover of letters. “ It’s the manner of your craft since ever one of them sang in the world ! But here’s their letter, John, here’s their letter ! ”

Then, glowing with satisfaction, Gilbert Rolfe read the magazine editor’s acceptance of John Kenadie’s songs. They were notable for a purely native flavor, the editor wrote, a simplicity and sincerity of theme and treatment which was both rare and precious. Wherefore the magazine would be pleased to publish a grouped number of the poems in an early issue, the editor being convinced that he was thereby introducing a new American poet to the world of letters.

John Kenadie drew a deep breath.

“ Who would ever have believed it ? ” he asked.  
“ It’s like a dream ! ”

Old Gilbert Rolfe laughed.

“ Please God, it was my dream. It’s coming true ! ”

So had it been his dream. He had encouraged in the boy the sheer love of this work to which his young soul had so instinctively turned. He had safeguarded him against any ignoble conception of it. He had taught him that it was good to do the work which he loved best to do; but only for the reason that it was the best loved work, not, God forbid, because of any other reward that might come from its doing. The poet Kenadie had grown into his best work because of this teaching. It was, indeed, old Gilbert Rolfe's dream. It was coming true.

John turned to the schoolmaster, his eyes shining.

"Dear Mr. Rolfe, I owe it all to you. There will be more of you than of me in those published verses. You don't know how grateful I am to you!"

The teacher allowed his hand to rest lovingly on the pupil's broad shoulder. "You had the gift, John," the simple worship of fine letters illuminating his gentle face. "It was God's great gift to you. He gave me one almost as great—the eyes with which to see your gift. So I am as proud as you, John!"

The two souls, both young, were very close together in that moment.

Then John Kenadie rode to meet Betty Thordike.

It was a canter through fairyland. Out from

the deep shade of the woods and into the wide and sunny sweep of fields on either side rode John Kenadie, dreaming of the great good fortune that had befallen him. The thought that most delighted him was that he had gained the right of fellowship with the world's singers. It was a thought almost poignant in its rapture. The young countryman rode as in a dream, peopling the woods and fields with the bright figures of his fancy, the goodly assemblage of the lettered elect, his heart always whispering to him that he had been called into their society. In even a nobler spirit, it was something as a gallant young esquire might have dreamed in mediæval days, having just won his knightly spurs and felt the touch of the royal accolade upon his shoulder.

He would see Betty at the end of his ride !

It was a peaceful and pleasant country through which to ride dreaming. The vast expanse of cotton lands was a motionless white ; snowy seas of bloom that made the country look as if in bridal attire. Here and there were fields of corn, the green turning to gold, vivid emerald and glorious yellow merging, the one into the other. Now and then John passed a picturesque cotton-gin of the old-fashioned type, with low and gabled roof of black-brown shingle, the structure's lower half open for the circling of the lever drawn by farm-horses, the ginning and lint-rooms above, long, ghostly fingers of last year's lint cotton even now fluttering

from the windows like weird signals. Adjoining this gin-house was its invariable companion, the baling press, its wooden screw rising high in air, its gaunt arm of a sweep descending like that of countryside wells in ancient pictures, quaintly silhouetted against the sky. At intervals a typical L'Anguille farmhouse came into the picture, its wide front facing the distant road, a broad gallery extending around three of its sides, the kitchen separate from the dwelling, the barn and stable some distance back and almost touched by the straggling rail fence from whose further side the fields began again. It was a picture of a life that was sweet to John Kenadie.

Sim Perkins was now a clerk in one of the village stores, and he hailed John as the latter rode through the little square to gain the river side of the ridge which sloped to the good steamer Mollie Hambleton's landing. Sim waved a familiar hand.

"Hello, John!" he cried with much innocence of tone. "Have you heard the news?"

"Hello, Sim!" responded John Kenadie. "What news?"

Sim Perkins laughed.

"Betty Thorndike's comin' home!" he replied. "She'll be on the Mollie Hambleton. Thought you'd like to know it, John!"

John saw that he had been trapped. He shook his fist at the rejoicing Sim Perkins and rode down the ridge to the landing place.

Here there stood an old and dilapidated warehouse, the storage place for shipments awaiting the Mollie Hambleton or for supplies received and to be called for by some farmer. The season being that when many farm orders were due to arrive, there was quite a gathering of townspeople and folk from the outlying plantations. John Kenadie dismounted, fastening his horse to a convenient sapling, and joined this gathering, glad of a chance to laugh and talk with the rest. The glow of Gilbert Rolfe's great news and of the certainty of seeing Betty in a little while was in his heart.

"Buck" Barbee of the bottom-lands, consistently grown into a village idler with a weakness for what he called "red eye" and of a dare-devil pugnacity, espied John Kenadie just as the latter shook hands with old Major Pettigrew, the one lawyer and leading politician of the locality, and came over with a significant smile enlightening his humorous countenance.

"Well, dag my buttons, John Kenadie!" cried Buck, wringing John's hand with an effusiveness due alike to honest liking and a little liquor; "ef you ain't a true and constant sweetheart, then dog-gone me ef I ever seed one! I'd 'a' swore on a stack o' Bibles higher 'n my head 'at you'd 'a' been here tud-day, sho'!"

"Why?" asked John, returning Buck's warm hand-grip.

"Jes' lissen to him, Major!" said Buck re-

proachfully. "An' him here a purpose, too! Why, you would n't think butter 'd melt in his mouth even! Jes' look at him, Major!"

"He cert'nly looks innocent enough, Buck," laughed the Major, an old-time statesman who always shaved and primped up generally in honor of the Mollie Hambleton's coming. "You say he's here for some ulterior purpose, my boy?"

"No sech a purpose, Major, ef that word o' yourn means anything short o' seein' his old flame!" was Buck Barbee's response. "That's it, John Kenadie, and you know it! You're at this landin' fer nothin' more ner nothin' less than ter see Miss Betty Thorndike come home from her schoolin' in Memphis, an' you can't deny it! You're 'shamed right now to look at her folks over yonder!"

John's face flushed as he laughed at the charge. "I give you my word, Buck," he answered, "I've got some goods on the Mollie Hambleton and I'm here to see about them, honest!"

"You're here to see about Betty Thorndike, too!" said Buck.

His glance was reproving. It was followed by a snort of incredulity. He laid an affectionate hand on John's shoulder.

"Then you've got ter come an' take a drink!" he cried. "Ef you ain't here to say howdy to Betty Thorndike, 't won't make no diff'unce ef you take a drink. That'll show me I was mistook!"

John laughed at Buck Barbee's artful snare.

"No, I can't, Buck!" he answered. "You know, I might — I might just meet Miss Betty accidentally, and so I'd better not drink anything. You'll have to excuse me!"

Buck Barbee hooted his triumph at this confirmation of his suspicions of John. Then he continued his sociable meandering through the gathering. The deep and musical whistle of the Mollie Hambleton came floating through the still air as she rounded the bend of the L'Anguille a mile away. John Kenadie's dark face was alight with glad expectancy.

Bob Hunter, freight clerk of the Mollie Hambleton, came running over the gang-plank before its outer and descending edge had touched the bank upon the steamer's arrival at the landing, springing ashore with his freight book and bills of lading under his arm. He called to John Kenadie as the latter passed him that the Kenadie shipment was aboard this trip, and then John gained the steamer's boiler-deck and sprang up the gilt-railed stairway to the snowy cabin.

Betty Thorndike was there. He saw her.

The girl's sweet face dimpled as John Kenadie advanced, doffing his soft hat, his eyes eloquent with the truth.

"I'm glad to see you, Miss Betty!" he cried, holding her hand tight in his own. It was Betty, indeed. It was his old sweetheart. Tantalizingly

pretty as a girl, she had grown into even a prettier young woman. John Kenadie's heart beat fast at the touch of her fingers. "You don't know how lonesome we've all been without you!"

"I reckon so!" laughed Betty, letting her hand rest in John's. "I reckon so! It's mighty nice of you to come down to meet me, and, oh, I'm so glad to see you, too, John! I wondered if you would be at the landing when I came home!"

It was the same Betty, even to the little freckle on her nose. Grown taller and slenderer, with a certain blushing dignity in her bearing, a womanly set to her gown, the touch of a city in her new manner, but yet the same Betty. The kiss of red was in her hair, there were the same laughing blue eyes, the same full and beautifully curving lips. It was Betty!

"If I would be here, Miss Betty?" John repeated, a great flood of happiness rising in his soul, "why, they could n't have kept me away from here with a regiment of men the day you were to come home! You don't know how long I've been looking forward to this day!"

"Well, then!" cried Betty, her face rosy red but full of mischief; "if that's the way you've been feeling, John Kenadie, why, you must come to see me and prove it!"

John caught a hint of the old-time fondness in Betty's voice, and it thrilled him through and through.

"I'll come to-morrow night, if you'll let me!" he said, bending close to her. "May I come, Miss Betty?"

The girl nodded to him gladly, just as she had used to do when he made a welcome proposition to her. She laughed her old, liking laugh to him, the sweet laugh which was so distinctly Betty's. John thought he could never be done looking at her.

Betty, in her turn, was mightily pleased to look at John Kenadie. The tall young figure satisfied her very soul. His healthy farm work had given him strength and suppleness without too much breadth of frame. Now, as in the old days, his suggestion of strength and physical force was tempered by a certain gentleness that made his manner keenly interesting. His face was the same earnest and thoughtful, yet swiftly lighting face, which Betty remembered in the boy John Kenadie. She noticed his big, firm hands, the easy swing of his shoulders, his length of limb. There was a proud steadiness in his level glance, the assurance of a healthy young manhood; but the brown eyes looking into Betty's had the same confession of masculine surrender which they always made to her. It amazed her that he had changed so little and yet so greatly; that there was no beard to hide the strong and sensitive mouth, that his every word and trick of manner was so veritably the John Kenadie of old, and yet that he was become

so potently a grown and masterful man. Betty liked the sameness and the change tremendously.

"Miss Betty," said John Kenadie, almost in a whisper, "you've brought me such good luck, the very day you come home. Some of my songs are going to be printed in an Eastern magazine. Old Mr. Rolfe has just told me!"

Betty's sweet eyes were filled with wonderment and pride.

"Oh, John!" she cried, "I'm so glad!"

A throng of friendly L'Anguille folk were coming toward them.

"When you come to-morrow night," whispered Betty radiantly, "you must tell me all about it, John. You don't know how proud it makes me feel!"

Then John Kenadie turned away, walking on air.

He came face to face with Hugh Latham. Hugh hurried past him to welcome Betty. John saw their meeting. The old capricious challenge to Hugh that he had so often seen in Betty's eyes was in them now.

"Hugh Latham!" she exclaimed. "Why, I would n't have known you! You've grown—goodness, Hugh, but you've grown so good-looking!"

Hugh was holding Betty's hand, his reckless face alight with a glow of admiration which had never shown itself in the old days.

“But you, Miss Betty,” he said earnestly, “I’m almost ashamed to speak to you — you’re so pretty and so fine ! ”

Betty’s pleased laugh hurt John Kenadie’s very soul.

## XIII

### THE RIVALS

BETTY THORNDIKE, on the morning following her return home, tripped joyously down the honeysuckle-bordered steps of the gallery, singing as she went for very lightness of heart, to make acquaintance anew with the flowers of the garden. They were her flowers, every bud and blossom of them, and she had worried vastly with black dread of the evil things which might befall them during the days of her exile.

"Have they been much trouble to you, mamma?" she called back to Mrs. Thorndike, a tranquil and sweet-faced picture of what Betty would be some day. "Oh, how nicely you have kept them all, dear!"

Mrs. Thorndike laughed at the girl.

"I reckon I knew a little about flowers and gardens before you were born, Betty!" she answered. "You know I love 'em as much as you possibly could. They made me think of you, too—it was like having you with me when I 'tended to them!"

Betty threw a grateful kiss to her mother, her eyes soft with love.

Then she was lost in her garden of delight.

It was the simplest and sweetest of country gardens. The Thorndike farmhouse was situate just far enough back from the brown and shady highway to give space for a yard-garden of ample territory. In this season of bloom Betty's flowers welcomed her royally. Morning-glories climbed the lattice which screened the wide gallery from the sun's rays. Honeysuckle flanked them on either side of the steps. Dainty lilacs nodded to Betty as she came singing among them. Old-fashioned cabbage roses welcomed her with petals of perfume. The sweet jasmine and touch-me-nots and four-o'clocks and tuberoses — it seemed to Betty Thorndike they all wore a magical holiday garb never before worn by them, so beautiful were they in honor of her home-coming. She stooped and kissed more than one of them.

"You darlings!" she said. "I've been homesick for you all!"

Not many feet within the wide-barred gate which fronted the roadway were two fine old oaks standing like sentinels on either side of the avenue leading up to the Thorndike homestead. Circling the trunk of each was a rude settee, broad and brown, with a rich and dark polish effectively contrasting with the rugged bark of the oaks. It was upon one of these quaint resting places that Betty contentedly sat herself when she had effected the loving reunion with her garden.

She was still there, her fresh young eyes alight with the joy of the morning, when Hugh Latham came riding into the countryside picture spread out before her eyes. It pleased Betty when she saw Hugh.

The young man promptly checked his horse at sight of the girl under the oaks. He dismounted with the easy swing of supple limbs and, passing one arm through the loop of the bridle-rein, came and leaned over the wide gate. He pushed his soft hat back until one sunburned forelock was revealed beneath its dark brim.

"Mornin', Miss Betty! Now I'm sure it wasn't a dream about your coming home yesterday! It's just like old times to see you home again!"

Betty nodded at Hugh, smiling.

"It's just like old times to be home!" she laughed. Betty knew with exactness how pretty she looked in such a setting. She immediately looked all the prettier by reason of her knowledge. She remembered also how Hugh's eyes had widened with admiring surprise at his welcoming glimpse of her on board the Mollie Hambleton the day before. It was the first time she had ever provoked such a look from him. It tickled her to see it dawning again in his eyes this morning. Betty could not help her temperament.

Hugh's glance rested upon her satisfactorily.

"Your schooling and all in Memphis has im-

proved you mightily," he said at last. " You 've come back looking just as pretty as a peach, Miss Betty ! "

Betty laughed out at this.

" Well ! " dimpling, and with an indignant pout following, " I like that ! Twice now, Hugh, you 've shown your surprise that I came back from Memphis looking anything like a pretty girl. Was I such a scarecrow, then, when I went away ? That 's a left-handed compliment, Hugh Latham, I 'd have you to know ! "

" No, it is n't, Miss Betty," said Hugh calmly. " I reckon you were pretty enough then, and knew it, too. Yet I don't remember that it seemed so to me, somehow."

Betty's glance at Hugh was reproving.

" Goodness alive ! That 's worse and worse, if you 're trying to say nice things to me. That means you 've clear forgotten how I did look, Hugh ! "

" Maybe I have, then," was Hugh Latham's placid response. " That 's no crime, now, Miss Betty. What I 'm trying to tell you now is how sweet you look this morning, not how you looked when you were a little girl ! "

There was a curious expression in Betty's eyes as she surveyed Hugh leaning over the fence and laughing at her. He was provokingly at ease.

" Don't try too hard, Hugh !" she said tauntingly. " Unless you 've been practicing while I

was away at school you don't know how to say such things!"

"Now you're mad!" retorted Hugh Latham quickly. "Ain't you?"

Betty could have pinched herself for blushing.

"No, I'm not!" she answered. "Of course I'm not, and you know it. What is there to be mad at?"

"I hope you ain't, anyway," said Hugh, a sudden humility and earnestness sounding in his voice. "Because I want to ask a favor of you, Miss Betty."

The girl did not answer. There was something of triumphant surprise in the glance veiled from Hugh by her long lashes.

"Miss Betty," he continued after a slight pause, "there's going to be a picnic next Tuesday in the woods near the old schoolhouse. It'll be just like a welcome home to you. Miss Betty"—and here he doffed his hat and ran his fingers awkwardly through his yellow hair—"Miss Betty, may I have the pleasure of being your escort if you have n't made any other engagement?"

Now it was Hugh who was blushing. Betty laughed.

"Well! If anybody had told me, I would n't have believed it! I'd have said it was impossible!"

There was disappointment in Hugh's face.

"What's impossible, Miss Betty?" he asked

anxiously. He was plainly puzzled and apprehensive. "I don't understand you. What is it that's impossible?"

"That you should want to go anywhere with a girl! And especially with me! Why, Hugh Latham, I give you my word, I hardly know you! Talk about people changing, indeed! You've changed so that you're not the old Hugh Latham at all!"

Hugh laughed and blushed both. Nevertheless, he was determined.

"Won't you go with me, Miss Betty?" he asked.

A malicious little thrill of triumph glowed in Betty Thorndike's very feminine soul. It was a new and more plastic Hugh Latham in the place of the old and indifferent Hugh, and seemingly much at her mercy now. She liked it.

"You're in an awful hurry!" she exclaimed. "I hardly realize yet that I'm really back home again. You're in an awful hurry!"

"I've got to be!" frankly confessed Hugh. "You ain't going begging for escorts, Miss Betty, and you know it, too. I was dead set on being the first to ask you, anyway. Won't you go with me, Miss Betty?"

Betty could not but be flattered by this amazing solicitude on the part of the transformed Hugh, once so impregnable to her coquettish assaults. It was true that his last words sent a sudden convic-

tion to her mind that John surely would ask her to go with him. Yet even this thought, so frail was Betty in her way, added to the attractiveness of Hugh's invitation. John Kenadie was always sure to be at her call. The sudden capitulation of Hugh Latham was full of tempting, and might not be trifled with as so certainly permanent.

The girl threw a rose she had been holding so that it described a pretty little curve in the air and descended within reach of the young fellow leaning over the gate. He caught it easily.

"Yes, Hugh," she said. "I'll go with you with pleasure."

Hugh Latham swung himself swiftly into the saddle. His handsome face was alight with triumph and there was a laugh in his reckless blue eyes. "I've got a new buggy, Miss Betty," he announced proudly, "and the best trotting horse anywhere around L'Anguille. I'll put on lots of style for your sake, and we'll go to that picnic at a '2.40 on the shell-road gait!' Thank you, very much, Miss Betty, for accepting me as your escort!"

There was unmistakable pride in Hugh's tone, and Betty was vastly flattered by his manner. He rode away gallantly, turning in his saddle and lifting his hat to her.

Then in a moment came to Betty a thought of John Kenadie, which sent a sudden and tender pang to her contradictory little heart: John, who

would be so sure to ask her, and with whom she would a thousand times rather go !

On the night of this same morning, John Kenadie, whose whole day had been filled with dreaming of Betty, rode through the starlight to her home, loving her with an infinitely deeper and stronger and more passionate love than that which had gone out to her in their childhood days. The love which a man feels had awakened and assumed the place of the boy's love.

It made the world a radiant heaven for John Kenadie. Not in all his life had he known such a night as this. It was so rich in beauty, so magical with voices that seemed to sing to him as he moved in its shining glory, so vital with a new life that thrilled in his blood like the glow of some miraculous cordial. All because he was going to see Betty !

She was standing at the foot of the gallery steps as he came swinging up the walk. He had left his horse at the old hitching post by the gate. She was expectant of him. She ran to meet him with a little cry of glad welcome.

" Oh, John ! " breathlessly. " John Kenadie, but I 'm glad to see you ! This is our real meeting, is n't it ? Not that on the boat yesterday, no, not that ! Oh, but it 's nice to be home again ! "

He had both her hands in his, and before he knew what he was doing John drew Betty to him and kissed her. It could not have been otherwise

with him. She was Betty, and all his world was filled with her.

"I love you, Betty!" he said, "I love you!"

The girl's arms had gone around his neck in all unconsciousness as he kissed her, and she returned his kiss with an uncontrol as dominating as his own. It was nature supreme in her.

The next flash of time and Betty had disengaged herself from John's embrace. She was blushing furiously.

"Upon my word!" and there was a happiness in her voice that it had never known before. "Of all things! Why, John Kenadie, I would n't have thought it of you! How dared you do it?"

John Kenadie marveled that he was not frightened, though even then he had a strange realization of the happiness in Betty's voice.

"I could n't help it, Betty!" he said humbly, but with his whole soul crying out to the perfect night with pridefulness in the yielding joy of her touch as he had held her close to him. "I 'll get down on my knees and beg your forgiveness, Betty — but I won't say I'm sorry! It's true what I told you. I love you. It seems to me I've been loving you all my life, and now all my life is just the one thing — just loving you, Betty!"

"Hush, oh, hush!" But she was looking at him with a splendid smile. Her glad young voice rang gloriously through the old house as she stood in the doorway, and called upward through the darkness.

"Mother! Oh, daddie, dear! Come down to the gallery for a little while! John's here!"

Old Squire Thorndike, farmer and justice of the peace, must have marveled at the strengthfulness of John Kenadie's hand-grip, although his weather-beaten face with its full beard of sunburned gray gave no sign. It is more than likely that Mrs. Thorndike, the matronly picture of Betty, could have told the Squire what it meant. But both she and Betty's father were normally cordial and easy, talking of ordinary things with an ordinary composure, which seemed to John Kenadie nothing less than miraculous. He could never thereafter remember one word of his in that astounding conversation. Yet he must have said something, he reflected.

Betty had become very demure and self-possessed by the time she and John were left alone on the moonlit gallery. She was so completely mistress of herself that it made him all the more nervous and awkward. Not until he rose to go could he tell her what was uppermost in his mind.

"Betty," he said, as she drew her hand out of his with a little laugh, "I want to ask you something. There's a picnic planned for next Tuesday and if you'll let me escort you — Oh, Betty, it is n't far from the old schoolhouse, it's almost in sight of where we made friends after that old quarrel, and you took the apple I had for you! I hope you'll go, Betty!"

"I am going," said Betty, a sudden shame in her eyes and a little break in her voice. "Only I can't go with you, John. I've promised Hugh Latham to go with him!"

John Kenadie's face was suddenly white and hard.

"You've promised Hugh Latham?" he asked, his voice trembling from the shock of Betty's words. "Why — why, Betty, how can it be? When did you promise him? You've only been home one day, Betty!"

Betty was blushing painfully.

"He came by to ask me this morning," she answered. "He seemed so glad to see me home, John! I was feeling so glad, too! And — and before I knew it I told him I'd go with him!"

"He came by to ask you?" repeated John as if dazed. "Hugh Latham came by to ask you? The first morning after you got back home?"

It was the ominous fact of this change in Hugh Latham which was rousing John to a mad resentment. Hugh had always been so indifferent. Betty was the one who had hurt him in the old days. He remembered fiercely that she had always seemed drawn away from him towards Hugh. Now — now if Hugh was beginning to court Betty, the test would come. Only this night, for the first time in his life, John had at last felt sure of Betty!

"You shan't go with him!" he cried. "You

shan't go. I'll settle it with him, Betty, you leave that to me! You shan't go with Hugh! He shall not take you, and I'll tell him so!"

Betty was frightened by John's swift anger.

"I could n't break the engagement, John!" she pleaded. "I made it so willingly, you know, of my own accord. Don't be mad at me, John, but can't you see it was my fault?"

"Mad at you, Betty?" repeated John Kenadie; and even then, unconsciously, he was making allowances for Betty's irresponsible coquetry. "I could n't be mad at you, Betty, if I tried. It's Hugh, to come sneaking to you so quickly — I'll make him sorry for it as sure as I live!"

"I forbid you to do it!" cried Betty, terrified into claiming her full prerogative of sex. "I forbid you to quarrel with Hugh about me! I won't have it. I have the right to tell you this!"

Then, tenderly, she rested both hands on John's arm.

"It was my fault," she said, "I could have made some excuse. I did n't. Yet I knew all the time, John, that you would be sure to ask me. It was my foolish way — but you know now, John, that I love you" — the girl's voice was breaking pitifully — "Oh, John, please, please mind me and do what I ask you! Let me go with him this time, and you go, too, so that we'll see each other there, and don't bring on a quarrel with Hugh about me! I won't do it again, because — because we've seen

each other's hearts now, and it would n't be right,  
John, for me to do it! Oh, won't you promise  
me, John?"

And John Kenadie promised.

Surely he was safe. Betty let him kiss her.  
Surely he was safe.

## XIV

### AN ERROR IN MEASUREMENT

"WON'T you come in, Hugh," called Miss Sugarlump, "and say howdy?"

Hugh left the farm wagon and passed through the gate.

Little Mrs. Kenadie advanced to meet him. She had been at her door as he was driving by and had waved her hand to him and thus greeted him.

"Howdy, Miss Sugarlump!" a genuine tenderness in his blue eyes as they rested on the sweet face under the softly graying brown hair. "It's always sorter comforting for me to get a look at you, somehow!"

"Is it, Hugh?" and Miss Sugarlump gently patted with her left hand the strong and sunburned fingers which grasped her right. "I'm so glad you feel that way towards me!"

By this time they had reached the veranda and seated themselves. Hugh Latham laughed into Mrs. Kenadie's eyes.

"Aunt Mary Lorena declares she gets real jealous of you sometimes, Miss Sugarlump. She says I think more of you than I do of her."

Little Miss Sugarlump drew a deep breath so suddenly that it sounded almost like a sob. Yet she was smiling happily.

"That is n't so, of course!" she replied, "because your Aunt Mary Lorena has been mighty good to you, and it's only natural that you should love her better than you do anybody else in the world!"

"She's the closest kin I've got in the world," responded Hugh. Then — "Miss Sugarlump, sometimes I feel like you're kin to me! Is n't that strange? Or, is it just because I'm naturally drawn towards you? It's always when you touch me that I feel it the most. Just a feeling that I have a right to love you, Miss Sugarlump — and it comes over me so strongly!"

"You great big boy, you!" exclaimed Miss Sugarlump. "Hugh, I'm so glad you said that, I'm so glad! It makes me think more of you than I ever did before. Yes, I want you to feel just that way!"

"Couldn't feel any other way if I tried!" laughed Hugh. He had removed his battered slouch hat, and the wind was playing with his yellow hair. Miss Sugarlump rose suddenly, and, standing for a moment behind him, she smoothed his hair with both her hands.

"You're letting it grow too long, Hugh," softly. Then she laughed.

"You need n't talk about Mrs. Poindexter being

jealous of me, Hugh. It would make Sonnie crazy with jealousy if he saw me petting you as I'm doing now!"

"He ought n't to begrudge it to me!" and Hugh's words were almost resentful. "He's had you all his life, Miss Sugarlump!"

There was a quick catching of Mrs. Kenadie's breath.

"I was only fooling!" after a little pause. "Of course he would n't begrudge it to you, Hugh! Do you know what Sonnie told me the day he saved you from drowning, Hugh?"

"No, ma'am," replied Hugh. "What did he tell you?"

"That he was certain you'd drown if he did n't get to you," answered little Miss Sugarlump, smiling to herself, "and he had such a strange feeling all at once. He felt that somehow he was kin to you, as if he was your brother, and a great love for you came into his heart. Then he risked his own life to save you, just as if you had really been his brother!"

Hugh Latham flushed quickly.

"It's mighty funny about John and me," wonderingly. "Miss Sugarlump, I can get mad at John quicker than at anybody else in the world. Yet, Miss Sugarlump, down in my heart I believe sometimes that I love him. It's the strangest feeling. I can't explain it!"

Miss Sugarlump's eyes were shining.

"There's some reason for it, Hugh," she replied. "You may be sure there's a good reason for it. You ought to encourage your liking for Sonnie. That's what I tell him about you. Nothing would give me so much happiness as for you and Sonnie to be drawn close together!"

Hugh Latham sat silent. He did not dare to tell little Miss Sugarlump that he and John had been on the very verge of a quarrel when he fell into the river. Neither had John told her.

Then Miss Sugarlump spoke suddenly.

"You won't be mad at me, Hugh, if I say something to you about yourself, something that's been troubling me greatly, will you?"

A swift uneasiness came into Hugh's face.

"I'm going to ask you to be careful about drinking, Hugh," said little Miss Sugarlump tenderly. "You don't mind, do you? It's just as if I was your mother and asked you to be careful. Won't you, Hugh?"

"Miss Sugarlump," answered Hugh, "maybe I don't drink the way you imagine. All the men around L'Anguille drink whiskey pretty freely, Miss Sugarlump!"

"I know they do!" cried little Mrs. Kenadie. "I know they do! It may be more dangerous for you than for them, Hugh! Maybe it's in your blood to drink hard! If it is—oh, Hugh, you ought to be so careful, you ought to be so careful!"

The young man made no reply. His glance did not meet Mrs. Kenadie's. There was a little pause.

"Won't you promise me to be more careful, Hugh?" Miss Sugarlump asked. "If you feel towards me the way you say, won't you promise me just that much?"

She laid one hand gently on Hugh's hand as she spoke.

Hugh bent his head.

"I'll do the best I can, Miss Sugarlump. I'm sorry you know that I drink too much sometimes!"

"And I'm glad I know it!" cried Miss Sugarlump. "It may keep you from it to know that I know, and that it hurts me when you drink. It's just the way your mother would feel, Hugh!"

There was something like tears in Hugh Latham's eyes.

"You're awful good to me, Miss Sugarlump!" he said, his voice shaking a little. "If anything'll keep me straight, that will!"

Miss Sugarlump bent down and kissed him.

John Kenadie came through the house whistling. He had returned from the fields for something needed in mending a broken bit of harness. He called cheerily to his mother.

"Mother! Where are you? Mother!"

Little Miss Sugarlump laughed happily at the cry.

"I'm out in front, Sonnie!" she answered. "Come on through!"

And John strode out on the veranda to find Hugh there with little Miss Sugarlump. His face hardened at sight of Hugh.

"Shake hands, why don't you, you two boys?" smiled Mrs. Kenadie. She stood midway between them, glancing first at one and then at the other. "Shake hands, as friends ought to do!"

Sonnie knew that his mother earnestly wished him and Hugh to like one another. It was not in him to hurt Miss Sugarlump by a display of his new resentment against Hugh. He advanced with outstretched hand.

"How d'ye do, Hugh?" he said, his voice helplessly cold.

"How are you, John?" responded Hugh.

The two stood with hands clasped, looking each into the other's eyes. The picture seemed to gratify little Miss Sugarlump marvelously. Her face was radiant.

"That's right, both of you!" she cried. "Do you know, it's the first time I ever saw you two shake hands!"

She came and put a hand on the shoulder of each.

"Sonnie's dark, and you're fair, Hugh. But you're both as near the same size as two men could well be. I never noticed it before!"

John and Hugh were strangely awkward and embarrassed.

"Stand back to back and put your heads to-

gether!" commanded little Miss Sugarlump laughingly. "There, that's right! I give you my word, there is n't a shade of difference in your height, not a shade! The same clothes would fit you both as if made for you!"

Her extended hand had rested for a moment on the two heads, the yellow and the brown. The faces beneath them presented a curious study of veiled hostility; but Miss Sugarlump never noticed this. When she stepped back a pace John and Hugh drew apart quickly.

"It makes me very happy to see you boys together like this," went on Miss Sugarlump innocently. "I used to be afraid you would n't be friends when you grew up. That's all over now. Especially since Sonnie saved your life, Hugh! Is n't that true?"

John Kenadie flushed at the words.

"Anybody would have done what I did. I would have done it for any one else just as I did it for Hugh. It's the same with him, I reckon!"

Miss Sugarlump laughed.

"Yet you would n't have felt as you did towards Hugh!" she exclaimed. "That shows you're closer to him than you make out, Sonnie! Hugh feels just the same towards you!"

John turned his eyes away from his mother's happy face. He was afraid of a revelation they might make to her.

"I've got to get back to work! I only ran in, mother, to get a leather strap I need for mending. Old Uncle Shadrach is waiting for me in the field right now!"

"I must be going into L'Anguille, Miss Sugarlump," announced Hugh Latham, glancing out to where the farm wagon awaited him. "I'll have to tell Aunt Mary Lorena that you kept me here talking!"

"I'll make that right this very minute!" laughed Miss Sugarlump. "I've got a pattern she's been wanting, and I'll let you take it to her now, Hugh. Just wait here till I get it!"

Then she hurried to her bedroom on the second floor.

The two young farmers faced each other quickly. It was as if each knew the other's thought.

"You were mighty quick, Hugh," began John, a swift anger in his voice, "about asking Miss Betty Thorndike to go to the picnic with you!"

"I had to be!" retorted Hugh. "I knew you wa'n't losing any time, either!"

"Since when did you get to be so anxious to go with her?" asked John, his jaws set hard and his upper lip lifting just a bit.

"Since the day she got home from Memphis, if you'd like to know!" came Hugh's answer. "I've got the same right to admire Miss Betty that you have, and I propose to exercise it if I feel like it. That's why I asked her to go with me!"

John Kenadie's promise to Betty was in serious peril of disaster. "I don't deny your right. I just wanted to find out how you stood, that's all. I'll know how to deal with you hereafter!"

At this Hugh's reckless eyes flashed a quick challenge.

"If there's any particular way you'd like to try," he sneered, "any way just between man and man, I'm at your service whenever you're good and ready!"

A hot reply sprang to John's lips. At that instant little Miss Sugarlump returned, a small parcel in her hand.

"I heard you two boys talking! That's what I like. It sounds friendly and sociable!"

Hugh Latham laughed, a little hint of shame in his face. John turned hurriedly away.

"Here, Hugh!" continued Miss Sugarlump, "this is the pattern your Aunt Mary Lorena wanted. Be sure and give her my love, Hugh!"

"Yes 'm, I will," answered Hugh. Then, with a touch of little Miss Sugarlump's hand in his own, he took his departure. John had already gone.

Miss Sugarlump stood watching Hugh as he drove off. A proud and happy smile was on her lips, and her hands were clasped as if in thankful prayer.

## XV

### TWO AT THE WINDOW

THE facetious Sim Perkins was quick to recognize the meaning of the incident when John Kenadie came alone to the neighborhood picnic in the L'Anguille woods, and it was speedily whispered about that Hugh Latham was to bring Betty Thorndike.

"Looky here, you John Kenadie!" he called out, as John joined the homely company, having first unsaddled and unbridled his horse and left him comfortably haltered in the shade of a near-by dogwood. "This won't do at all! We counted on Miss Betty Thorndike being at this picnic!"

"She'll be here all right, Sim, I reckon!" answered John good-humoredly, knowing countryside ways. "Don't you be afraid about Miss Betty not coming, Sim!"

"Well, maybe so and maybe not!" retorted Sim Perkins. "That's only what you think, and we want to be sure. We counted on your bringing Miss Betty to the picnic!"

There was a little flock of L'Anguille girls at Sim's elbow. They were waiting to profit from a study of Betty Thorndike's Memphis fashions. All

knew that Hugh Latham was coming as Betty's escort. The joke was on John. They could not but snicker at Sim's thrust, teasing a disappointed swain being a primely favorite L'Anguille amusement when occasion arose.

John Kenadie had a good grip on himself.

"If you counted on that, Sim," he replied lightly, "it was a case of counting your chickens before they were hatched."

"So I see, so I see!" confessed the delighted and merciless Sim. "I'll bet a Barlow knife and a pair of red-top boots, John Kenadie, that it was n't your fault the wrong chicken has been hatched!"

This was a home thrust; so humorous a sally as to provoke a gust of girlish laughter at John's expense. The victim laughed himself at Sim's keen jest. He remembered that, after all, Betty loved him.

"You'd win the bet, Sim," he acknowledged, but flushing a little as he defied the L'Anguille girls with a glance as full of fun as those being leveled at him. "I must say it was n't my fault that I'm not Miss Betty's escort. It's a case of better luck next time, I hope!"

This manful bearing of John's took the keenest of its savor away from the popular relish of Sim Perkins's joke, leaving the victim a sudden favorite with the feminine audience. At that moment, too, Betty and Hugh came in sight, Hugh's

new buggy and spirited horse making a gallant show.

Betty sprang lightly from the buggy, laughing at something Hugh had just said. She looked bewilderingly pretty. A white Memphis frock of stylish make was her gown of the day. A feathery light and snowy hat of wide and summery sweep brought out daintily the freshness of her young face. A white and much belaced parasol was lifted as a screen between her sweet self and the L'Anguille sun. It was Betty in her finest.

John went straight to her, unmindful of the tittering group left behind. Anger had leaped into his eyes for a moment, but they softened wonderfully the next. The gladness and love in Betty's own eyes were unmistakable.

"Miss Betty," when he had greeted her, "I want your promise. Just for one thing, Miss Betty! Won't you take a walk with me to the old schoolhouse after dinner? For old times' sake, when we were boys and girls together?"

Betty dimpled and blushed. Hugh intercepted her answer.

"Don't I have something to say about that?" he asked, laughing down at her in his old dominant manner.

"No," said John quickly, "you don't. This is for Miss Betty to settle. Won't you go with me, Miss Betty?"

Betty had felt a sudden resentment at Hugh's

laugh. He was disposed to make too much of his triumph. She feared John's temper.

"Indeed I will go with you, John!" giving him a sweet and yielding look of superb womanliness. "It's just the nicest thing in the world for you to think of it!"

Hugh Latham, a chagrined anger stirring in his bosom, felt the sting of Betty's tenderness towards John Kenadie. His blue eyes flashed.

"It seems to me that I'm Miss Betty's escort to-day, and that I'm entitled to her company."

"It seems to you wrong, then," answered John Kenadie, "if you mean to claim her company for the whole day. Right now's a good time for you to get that idea out of your head!"

With these brusque words he turned again to Betty. "I'll come for you right after dinner, then, Miss Betty," gently. When the girl had again consented as sweetly as before, he lifted his soft gray hat to her, laughed in Hugh's face, and turned away.

Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter called to him before he had gone far into the thick of the country gathering. She had stopped by for Miss Sugarlump and they were together now.

"What does all this mean, John Kenadie?" Mrs. Poindexter asked teasingly. "Here I come expecting to see you and Betty Thorndike together like two turtle-doves, and I find you mooning around by yourself! What's come over you?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Poindexter," replied John, smoothing the frown which his last glance at Hugh had left on his brow. "Nothing, except that I was too slow about asking her to come with me. Hugh got ahead of me!"

"Hugh?" repeated Mrs. Poindexter. "Well, I declare to gracious! When did Hugh get to sparkling Betty, I'd like to know?"

John's face darkened. "You'll have to ask him about that," he answered shortly.

Mrs. Mary Lorena Poindexter noticed the change of manner. She lifted her hands and smote them together with an amused laugh.

"Oh, you boys, you boys! If I don't believe you're both ready to spring at one another's throats right now!"

Then she turned to Miss Sugarlump.

"Just exactly as they did that first day at school, Miss Sugarlump!" she continued. "Only it's Betty now that comes between them! What'll we do with two such boys, I ask you?"

Little Mrs. Kenadie made some rejoinder in apparent keeping with Mrs. Poindexter's playful mood. Her face was troubled.

Immediately at the close of the noisy and frolicsome woodland dinner on the grass of a pretty open space which was yet properly shaded John sought out Betty. She sat with Hugh in the company of a laughing group.

"I've come for you, Miss Betty," he said.

Betty rose and shook out her white skirts. Her eyes were tender.

"I'm ready, John," she replied. "I was waiting!"

They went away together gladly.

It was a dreamful walk through the cool shade of the woods to the old schoolhouse. John and Betty were both silent at first. Yet it was an understanding silence. There was no hint of awkwardness in the occasional speech by which it was broken. When they came to the crossing of the two roads where they had so often met of mornings and parted of afternoons on their way to and from school the two sweethearts looked at one another and laughed happily.

"You remember, John, don't you?" Betty asked softly.

"Remember?" repeated John, a deep tenderness in his voice. "I can see you there, Betty, under the shade of that old tree, a little girl in a short calico dress and a big sunbonnet, just as plainly as I see you now. I almost feel like calling to you and waving my books at you!"

"Then I'd wave mine back at you, John," said Betty. "Then I'd cry: 'Hurry up, John Kenadie! Make haste! We'll be late at school, sure!'"

"That's just what you used to say!" laughed John. It was as much as he could do to keep from planting a swift kiss on the tantalizing lips smiling up at him from beside his shoulder. They

were the same sweet lips that had so disturbed his boyhood's dreaming. Surely this Betty Thorndike belonged to him from that dear time for all time to come. He could not imagine the world with Betty not in it for him to love.

From the moment they came to this meeting of the two old roads every succeeding step awakened memories of their early sweetheartsing. It was John who pointed out the very spot where the cow had frightened Betty and made it possible for him to begin overtures for the reconciliation which was sealed by the gift of the apple. Betty confessed now that she had kept his forlorn little figure in the tail of her eye all the way from the schoolhouse. Then, as they came in sight of that brown and familiar home of countryside learning, she showed John just where he had stood in the playground when he was first tormented by the other children. She knew the exact spot of his dreadful encounter with Hugh. And John made Betty laugh by leading her to the trunk of the identical tree where the two of them had stood blushing, when the shameless "Buck" Barbee proclaimed the truth of their infatuation to all their little world.

Then, suddenly — they had not even thought of what it would mean to them — both John and Betty realized that old Gilbert Rolfe's school was at that very moment in busy session, the new brood of scholars doubtless toiling resentfully at

the hard labor of "books" just resumed for the afternoon.

"Oh, don't go to the door, John!" whispered Betty with soft eyes. "Let's just peep in at the windows once and then steal away. It'll be our own dear little old school then!"

Together they crept stealthily, crouching, to the shelter of the schoolhouse wall, just under an open window. Lifting their heads cautiously, they peeped in at the quiet picture. Old Gilbert Rolfe was high in state on his rostrum, "hearing" the geography lesson. The apprehensive class was lined up before him. One child was blushing with confusion at having failed to answer a question properly. Ah, how lovingly did the two sweethearts dwell on the homely little scene!

Then, as if moved by a common impulse, their eyes sought one especial desk on the girls' side of the room. It was the identical desk which John Kenadie, in dire disgrace, had shared with Betty Thorndike. A little girl with a saucy face sat at it even now.

Betty was half laughing and half crying when they stole away from the window. Neither of them spoke a word until they had left the little clearing and were once more in the hushed afternoon woods.

"That dear old desk of yours, Betty!" said John. "It was right there that I fell head over heels in love with you!"

"I was afraid you'd forget to look at it!" answered the girl, in a tremulous whisper. "If you had, John, I never would have forgiven you, never!"

John had stood the test and Betty was proud.

So they went back to the scene of the picnic. If Hugh Latham had known what was in both their hearts, he would have resented the easy willingness with which John surrendered Betty back into his charge. Also would he have understood why John went straightway and saddled his horse and rode silently homeward. There was nothing but loss for John Kenadie if he remained longer — the dimming of the sweet picture of Betty turning from the window of the little schoolhouse with tender tears shining in her eyes.

Yet was there a disturbing experience remaining for Betty, though it was a something which John could not have prevented by remaining. It came at that time of hurry and confusion and much laughter and shouting of farewells when the day of the picnic was ended.

Betty and Hugh had gone to where his buggy stood removed from the roadside. Hugh, having unhaltered and bridled his horse and thrown the harness upon him, was leading him to the shafts. Betty stood full in the roadway, the two exchanging idle words as Hugh went about his task.

Then came a sudden crash just a few steps down the road behind Betty, a woman's shrill shriek, a man's abrupt cry of command to a horse, and then

the swift and mad beat of hoofs on the roadway. Hugh Latham gave one quick glance past Betty. Dropping the rein by which he was leading his horse to the buggy, he reached Betty's side at one splendid bound. He threw his arms about her and dragged her from the road with a strength and swiftness almost incredible. The next moment a runaway horse attached to a light buggy, the dashboard of which had been splintered by a kick, thundered past over the very spot in the road where Betty had stood but an instant before.

"Good God!" cried Hugh, white-faced and still holding Betty in his arms, "I thought you'd surely be killed, Betty!"

He pressed the girl to him, unconscious, seemingly, of what he was doing. Her frightened eyes opened and gazed into his.

"I love you, Betty!" Hugh cried, kissing her. "I love you! My God! I thought you were going to be killed before my very eyes!"

"Please don't, Hugh!" said Betty weakly, disengaging herself from his embrace. "Oh, you must not! You must not! You were brave and strong and quick to save me—but you must never again say what you have just been saying to me!"

Then Hugh Latham regained his self-control and was silent. The drive homeward, though its quiet was broken by few words, was nevertheless a stormy and tumultuous time for both of them.

## XVI

### "HOW JEALOUS YOU ARE!"

"DID you have a good time at the picnic, Sonnie?" asked Miss Sugarlump.

John looked at his mother and blushed. Mrs. Kenadie smiled.

"I had a mighty good time, mother!" he replied. "But I ought to have looked after you more than I did. How did you get along?"

Little Miss Sugarlump's brown eyes grew mockingly reproachful.

"You certaiuly forgot all about your mother!" she said. "If it had n't been for Mrs. Poindexter I don't know what I'd have done!"

Sonnie's face expressed remorse. His mother had been lonely.

"Was Betty nice to you?" she inquired softly. And John went and put his arm about her and kissed her tenderly. "Mother," quietly, "I love Betty, and I reckon I might as well let you know about it now. Do you mind my loving her?"

"I knew it long ago, Sonnie," Miss Sugarlump made answer.

There was a little pause when she had spoken.

"Do you think Betty loves you, too, John?" she asked finally.

A manful pride came into John's eyes at this.  
"I know she does, thank God! She told me so!"

"I'm so glad!" continued Miss Sugarlump.  
"I wanted her to love you. Yet I was afraid she might love Hugh instead!"

"Hugh!" repeated John Kenadie, an ominous note in his tone. "Then you've noticed it, mother, have n't you? It was n't imagination on my part, believing that Hugh loved Betty? I saw it at once! I saw it!"

Miss Sugarlump was startled by his change of manner.

"What difference can it make now, even if he does love her?" she asked. "Betty has told you that she loves you. She will tell Hugh the truth if he makes love to her. That will end it!"

John's face was dark with anger.  
"If Hugh makes love to Betty, he's got to answer to me for it! He knows he has no business fooling around Betty. He's got to settle with me if he does it!"

"Sonnie," replied little Miss Sugarlump quickly, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I'm ashamed of you this very minute!"

There was a strange earnestness in the words.  
"All your life," resumed Miss Sugarlump, "you've been quick to hate Hugh. All your life you've had the best of him!"

She had never spoken in this way before.

"Just think of it, Sonnie dear," she continued. "You've had your mother and your home always. Hugh has had neither, except as that good Mrs. Poindexter could make it up to him. He has been lonely, an orphan, raised by distant kin. You'll never realize what a difference it makes. Now, if he, too, loves Betty, it will mean only suffering for him. It is you that Betty loves. You ought to be sorry for Hugh, not mad at him, Sonnie!"

Miss Sugarlump's voice was shaking as she finished her speech.

The words had an instant effect on John's mood. His expression softened and there was a look of shame in his eyes as they rested upon her.

"You are right, mother. You're the tenderest-hearted little mother in the world! I have had the best of Hugh all my life, just as you say. I'm always too hard on him and too quick to lose my temper with him!"

Miss Sugarlump nodded her head sadly.

"I'm going to fight against that feeling," continued John. "It won't be easy, mother, because there's something in me that seems to be beyond my control where Hugh is concerned, and it sets me wild to think of his making love to Betty. Yet I mean to be fair to him if I can. I believe I could like Hugh if I could only remember what you've just said whenever I think of him!"

"I am sure you could, Sonnie," agreed Miss Sugarlump.

And when John had gone out to the fields his mother went singing about her household tasks. It seemed to Miss Sugarlump that she had found the happy way out of a very dark and perilous place.

That evening John left his mother with a kiss and a blush, saying that he was going to see Betty.

"Anyway, she has my name of Elizabeth," commented little Miss Sugarlump. "That's some comfort, since I'm to be put in the background! You must tell her that I love her for her name, Sonnie."

"I'll tell her you love her for herself!" John replied.

When he arrived at Betty's home he found Hugh there. It was something of a shock to him, but he remembered his mother's words. He had the best of Hugh — Betty loved him.

Hugh himself was surprised at the friendliness of John's greeting. The manner of both at the picnic had been one of barely concealed hostility. This second meeting in Betty's presence possessed possibilities of danger. Yet John Kenadie had changed in the mean time.

"How are you, Hugh?" he asked, after greeting Betty. He held out his hand. Hugh grasped it mechanically. Betty's pleasure was apparent in her face.

"How are you, John?" Hugh responded awkwardly. He was in some confusion. "I—I hardly expected to meet you here!"

John Kenadie's eyes flashed for a moment. Then he laughed.

"You're likely to meet anybody here, at any time, now that Miss Betty's home again. You'll certainly meet me, just as long as Miss Betty'll let me come!"

There was a covert challenge and announcement of intention in the words. Hugh accepted them with a reckless and tantalizing light in his own eyes.

"I reckon I'll have to say the same thing," he rejoined, throwing his head back and laughing at Betty. "Miss Betty's come back from Memphis such a beauty that she'll have all the L'Anguille men at her feet before long. She gives you credit, John, for having been in love with her when she was a little girl. You've got the start on the rest of us."

The careless words stung John Kenadie to the quick. In despite of her fears, Betty found the situation full of a new delight. She blushed and dimpled, first at Hugh and then at John.

"You have n't heard what happened after you went away, have you, John?" she asked. "Hugh saved me from being run over and killed!"

At this a great flush of mad resentment, surprise, and apprehension swept into John Kenadie's face. He glanced from Betty to Hugh, his lips firmly set, his brow darkening with anger.

"Hugh saved you?" he repeated. Again he glanced from one to the other. Again he laughed.

"Tell me about it!"

Betty told the story vividly. It was plain that she set much store by Hugh's performance. The romance of the situation appealed to her. She remembered that both these listeners had avowed their love for her. It was not in Betty to miss the enjoyment of such a situation.

John turned to Hugh when the story was finished.

"That's why you are here now," harshly. "It's a fine thing to save a girl's life. It gives you a better chance with her, does n't it?"

"I hope so," answered Hugh defiantly.

"And it was so easy!" sneered John, uncontrollable anger making him ungenerous to Hugh. "It was so easy. All you had to do was to pull her from the road. Yet it was saving her life!"

"John Kenadie!" cried Betty. "I'm ashamed of you!"

John laughed as he turned and caught the indignant gleam from Betty's eyes.

"All right, Miss Betty," carelessly. "I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings by what I said to Hugh. It's all so sudden, his saving you so grandly and you being so sensitive about him! It'll take me a little time to get used to it!"

The bitter scorn in his voice hurt Betty. It also angered her.

"I'd have a mighty poor spirit," she exclaimed, meeting his glance defiantly, "if I was n't grateful to Hugh! I am grateful to him. He risked his own life to save mine. It was brave of him. I won't forget it, even if it does make other folks mad!"

A great gleam of hope sprang into Hugh Latham's blue eyes. Again he threw his head back and laughed at Betty. Then he faced John.

"I'm not taking any particular credit to myself for what I did," still laughing. "I reckon any other man would have done the same in my place. Yet there's one thing I would n't do, John Kenadie. I would n't try to belittle the other man who happened to save Miss Betty's life!"

"I don't believe you would, Hugh!" cried Betty quickly. She could have bitten her tongue off when she saw how keenly her impulsive speech stung John Kenadie. His face went white as he heard Betty's condemning words.

"I'm sorry, Miss Betty. I'm sorry I happened to come to-night and behave in a way to displease you. I'll go away now. I have spoiled part of your evening, but I won't spoil the rest of it."

Then, swiftly, he turned to Hugh, his brow black with anger.

"You and I won't pass words before Miss Betty any more. I have something I want to say to you, but it can be said between ourselves better. I'll see that you hear it!"

Hugh laughed.

"This was your choice," he answered. "I did n't pick the time nor the place. Any other time and place will suit me, if you feel like continuing the argument."

Betty was quick to read the meaning in the two faces before her.

"There 'll be nothing of the sort!" she cried; yet even then her feminine soul exulted in the quarrel for her favor. "You and John shall not fall out about me! I know what you 're driving at, both of you. It 's foolish — it 's just like when you were boys, always quarreling with one another. I forbid you to quarrel about me!"

A silence followed this speech of Betty's.

"Hugh, you 've got to give me your word that there won't be anything more of this on your part!"

Hugh's face was triumphant. It seemed to him significant that Betty turned to him first and spoke in a tone so soft.

"I 'll promise that, Miss Betty!" he replied instantly. "So far as it 's in my power, there 'll be nothing more!"

"Now you 've got to promise, John!" urged Betty. There was a great tenderness in her face as she turned to John Kenadie.

"I promise you, Miss Betty," he answered. "It was all my fault, anyway."

Betty laughed joyfully. The danger was past.

When Hugh rose to leave some time afterward Betty prevented John's going out with him. She felt instinctively that there would be peril in their attempting to ride together in friendship that night. It needed but a sign from her to hold him, just as it had needed but a sign to make him remain when he had first essayed to go a little time earlier. John was helpless with Betty.

"John Kenadie!" and Betty's face was grave when Hugh had gone. "You had no right to quarrel with Hugh and you know it! You must not take it on yourself to behave in this way when you meet him here. Because he saved my life, I could not forbid him coming, even if I wished. Yet I can forbid you to lose your temper!"

"Tell me one thing, Miss Betty," said John Kenadie. "Has Hugh ever made love to you?"

A wave of red swept over Betty's face.

"I will not tell you! You have no business to ask me. If — if Hugh had said anything of the kind to me, it would not be fair to tell you. Besides, John, I know what you'd do. You'd go straight and force him into a fight!"

"Are you afraid for Hugh's sake?" John asked bitterly. "Now that he has saved your life, are you afraid for his sake?"

"Shame on you!" sobbed Betty. "I will not answer you!"

John's soul reproached him.

"I love you so, Betty! Hugh Latham — I can-

not bear that you should let him make love to you ! You have always had a weakness for him ! You turn from me to him, always ! I am never sure of you ! Hugh seems always about to take you away from me ! ”

Now Betty was laughing at him.

“ How jealous you are ! ” she taunted, dimpling.  
“ Oh, how jealous you are ! ”

## XVII

### NEWS FROM THE EAST

OLD Gilbert Rolfe went straightway into the fields to find John.

He could not wait.

The magazine containing the poems was in his hand.

The schoolmaster's face was alight with excitement. To him, humble lover of letters that he was, it seemed the greatest event in both their lives. He limped across the furrows in a pathetic eagerness. He waved his old hat to John Kenadie at the plough.

"They're out, John!" he cried. "They're out!"

His fine face was shining and quivering with unselfish rapture.

John Kenadie knew at once what it all meant. He had been deep in disturbing thought of Betty and her trying ways with Hugh. The sight of the old schoolmaster, calling his soul back to its gentler love, was like a balm of peacefulness.

He checked his horse in the furrow and left the plough.

"Have they come indeed, Mr. Rolfe?" he asked,

his eyes as full of simple ardor as a boy's. "How do they look? The reading of them in print? How do they read, Mr. Rolfe?"

The schoolmaster laughed gleefully at this.

"The magazine people knew what they were about, John!" he answered. "They've selected your very best poems! It's fine! It's just fine!"

An ancient and wide-spreading oak stood at the far fence from which John had been ploughing across the field. Together the old man and the young went into its shade. They sat down together on the ground.

Gilbert Rolfe surrendered the magazine to John.

There was no word spoken for a time. It was a breathless silence. To John Kenadie, opening the magazine's pages where his poems were printed, the moment was like a new and wonderful dawn. He divined, rather than understood, the strange world that then came into being for him. He felt the inspiration of it.

Two pages of the magazine were filled with his songs.

They were delicately arranged. The technical craftsmanship of their presentment was a mystery to the poet himself, but he could appreciate the excellence of the work. It all seemed so beautiful that John Kenadie caught his breath with the poignant delight of it. They were his songs thus

presented to the world. It was like a miracle in his eyes.

The mere look of his poems, their beauty and dignity in such garb, thrilled John beyond measure. The songs, reading them so, were magical. They must have been appreciated by those strangers who had honored them with a station so proud. Each word that he read, trembling, struck John Kenadie's heart with a rapture that was almost pain.

He looked up into old Gilbert Rolfe's face at last, laughing and blushing just as he had done after reading his first lesson at the old schoolmaster's knee years ago.

"Is n't it all wonderful?" he asked, exactly as a boy might have asked, filled with the marvel of it all. "They read so much better! Don't you notice it, Mr. Rolfe? It's almost as if a new spirit had been put into them!"

The old schoolmaster chuckled, his eyes twinkling.

"Nothing new has been put into them, John," he answered, "they're in print, that's all, and beautifully printed, too. Yet they're the same songs you and I knew before any one else. I never dreamed, though, that the magazine would do so much with them!"

Old Gilbert Rolfe was profoundly moved. His voice trembled and broke and he placed his hand lovingly on the open page.

"Do you remember, John," he asked softly, "that first afternoon when I found you writing the cornfield song for old Shadrach?"

John Kenadie burst into a boyish laugh at the question.

"When you made me sing it to you afterwards?" he responded. "Indeed I do, Mr. Rolfe! That was the beginning of it all!"

Gilbert Rolfe's eyes were resting on the book.

"That was the beginning," he said, lifting them to meet John's. Again he touched with a quaint tenderness the open page. "This is the beginning, too, John. A new beginning and a new audience. You'll have to reckon with the world after this, not with me. I believe I'm jealous, now that my time is past!"

John Kenadie's face flushed quickly.

"Why, Mr. Rolfe! It's to you I look for all I wish to hear or know about my songs. What good will it do me if these far-away people are to take your place? Here's my dream, Mr. Rolfe! I want them to say honestly that I'm a true poet. I want my songs to be in a book by themselves. After that I want just you and I to talk it all over, Mr. Rolfe, between ourselves, and to laugh with each other that the dream came true! You know how to bring all this to pass, because you've lived in cities and had knowledge of the world, while I've grown up right here in L'Anguille. Why, I could n't get along without you, Mr. Rolfe!"

The schoolmaster laughed at John's simplicity.

Then he took fresh grasp of the magazine, bending his white head above the two pages of John Kenadie's poems. They were like two children, the old and the young countryman who had thus made their joint way into the world of letters.

"It seems to me," suggested Gilbert Rolfe, "that they must have thought a good deal of your songs, John, to print so many of them and in so beautiful a way!"

His voice trembled as he spoke.

"I hope they did!" replied John simply. "It would mean so much!"

Gilbert Rolfe glanced at him curiously.

"I don't believe you realize just what it would mean," he made answer. "It's only because you love the songs that you want others to appreciate them. Is n't that it, John?"

"Of course, Mr. Rolfe," replied John. "What else could it be?"

The old schoolmaster laughed.

"It means a great deal more than that," he responded. "It means, John, that they think they've discovered a new poet, and they're placing his work before the world in the most effective manner possible to them. It means, if I'm not mistaken, that you'll be famous before very long. A magazine of such influence as this can do much to call attention to you. Have n't you thought of all this, John?"

The young man lying prone on the ground, his cheek resting in the hollow of his hand, shook his head. Then, suddenly, he sat upright.

"I begin to see. Now I begin to understand how you were guiding me, Mr. Rolfe. You purposely kept me from thinking of such things, did n't you?"

Gilbert Rolfe's grim eyes had a tender twinkle in them.

"You knew what would come of it all," continued John. "You knew, because you have known such things in the big world outside. You knew as well that I ought not to think of them at all. Is n't that it, Mr. Rolfe?"

"Yes, John, that's it," answered Gilbert Rolfe. "I wanted you to work for love of the work alone. That was the only way in which you could do the best work that was in you. You must keep on in the same way. If you do not, it will be the worse for your songs!"

John Kenadie's dark face was alight with grateful love as his glance rested on the face of the old schoolmaster.

"I wish you could get your rightful share of all this happiness, Mr. Rolfe! It is all as much yours as mine!"

"I am getting my share," said Gilbert Rolfe, "and it is even better than I thought it would be!"

His hand was again tenderly stroking the book as he spoke.

There was a little silence between them then.  
Old Gilbert Rolfe spoke again.

"I've been dreaming about all this, John. I think now it will be possible to find a publisher who will bring out all your songs in book form. You ought to write to one of them and find out. You'll not be unknown to them now, you know."

John Kenadie blushed at the imputation of fame.

"I'm afraid you have really been dreaming, Mr. Rolfe, and you don't know how foolish I'd feel trying to convince people that I'm a poet. I could hear them laughing at me!"

It was an honest utterance. John Kenadie had all the modesty of a country lad who sang songs for sheer love of his gift's exercise. He was too ignorant to pose.

"If you don't send them," answered Gilbert Rolfe, "I'll do it myself. I have them all in my keeping anyway. That's what I'll do as it is. The publishers may think it strange, not hearing from you direct, but I can tell them you wished me to do it."

"Tell them that you know what to do and that I don't," suggested John. "Tell them, besides, all you've done for me. Then they'll understand."

Now old Gilbert Rolfe blushed.

"I suppose I could do that," he agreed, a little ring of pride in his voice. "It would be right, would n't it?"

John Kenadie felt a sudden lump in his throat at this.

"Right, Mr. Rolfe?" he repeated, and his hand touched that of the old schoolmaster on the open page of his poems. "It is so right that I should always be ashamed if you did not do it. They ought to know it, Mr. Rolfe. It's a part of the very songs themselves!"

The next moment he had risen, his eyes on the distant plough.

"It's time to go into the house. You've got to come to dinner with me, Mr. Rolfe, and tell my mother the good news!"

Shortly he had released the old plough-horse and was leading him home for his noonday feed and rest. Gilbert Rolfe walked beside him, as they had walked in company through the fields many a time before.

Now, as always before, they talked of the gentle things of letters and the bookish life. They were devoted disciples.

Gilbert Rolfe sent all the poems away on the following day. He believed the time had come for the supreme test. He was frightened a bit, but resolute notwithstanding.

"It is a world that knows its own," his hopeful thought ran. "It will know John."

## XVIII

### THE COMING OF MRS. FAULKNER

"BETTY," said John almost fearfully, "won't you promise to marry me? Won't you do this, Betty, so that I can say that we're engaged? You don't know how much it means to me if you will. Won't you, Betty?"

The girl had been very good and sweet that evening.

Yet John was fearful of Hugh.

More than once of late there had been a return of that strange mood of Betty's which made her lean towards Hugh and away from John. It could not be explained. It did not seem even that Betty could fairly be blamed. The fault had been a fault of her childhood. It had lived into her young womanhood. She was helpless when the mood came upon her. It frightened John.

A startled blush swept over Betty's white throat and face as John Kenadie's earnest eyes rested upon her, asking an answer.

"Oh, John, I can't!" she replied, breathing quickly. "I've promised that I would n't!"

"You've promised?" cried John, a wild amazement and suspicion waking in his mind. "Why,

Betty, who in the world should you make such a promise to? Why did you promise?"

Betty was blushing deeply.

"I've promised it to mamma," her voice very low. "She is so anxious for me not to marry too young, John. Mamma herself was married to papa when she was hardly more than a girl, you know, and while she's been very happy, she thinks it's a mistake for a girl to marry so young. She says that a girl who does, sacrifices all her sweet and beautiful life as a young woman, the time when she loves to be admired and to go around with young men and other girls and have a good time. She says I'm just through with school, John, and must n't think of marrying, and — and — well, I promised her I would n't, John, and that I would n't be engaged for a while!"

Betty was still blushing and sending shamed and loving glances at John Kenadie. It seemed to John that she was surely the loveliest thing ever created. He realized the sweetness of the confidence which she thus made to him.

"Betty," he asked, himself blushing, though filled with pridefulness at thought of her words, "have you told your mother that I love you and that I have asked you to marry me?"

Betty nodded in answer.

"Did you tell her," John continued, his voice shaking, "that you care something for me? Did you, Betty?"

Again there was a nod of Betty's head.

"That was what she said then?" asked John.  
"She did not mind, except that she thought you were too young? She did not object to me?"

"She likes you, John," answered Betty, dimpling just a little. "She didn't object to you at all. It's only that she does n't want me to marry just yet."

It was as much as John could do to keep his arms from Betty. Never had she looked so pretty. Blushing became her.

"I reckon your mother's right, Betty," humbly. "I reckon she's thinking of your happiness when she says you must not marry too young. I ought to be glad and proud — and I am — that you are willing for me to love you and — and that you care for me in return. I should be ashamed of myself for being jealous. I feel like getting down on my knees and begging you to forgive me for it! Will you, Betty?"

Then Betty dimpled in earnest.

"You big boy!" she laughed. "Of course I forgive you! You ought to know by this time that it is n't necessary for me to promise you what you were asking! Are you afraid I'm going to marry Hugh?"

John did not even trouble himself to answer this alarming question. Betty's manner made him feel so sure of her. He felt correspondingly indifferent concerning Hugh. Hugh, indeed!

Yet the next afternoon Betty went driving with Hugh.

It was the merest chance that John Kenadie encountered them. He had gone over to the Prewitts' to visit old Gilbert Rolfe and was returning homeward through the twilight. It sent a chill to his heart when he met them on the road. They were both laughing merrily.

Betty's face went red when she saw John. She bowed and called him by name. He lifted his hat in greeting. Hugh looked him full in the eyes and laughed. Then they had gone past.

Even with this perturbing proof of Betty's willful coquetry, it was not in John Kenadie's mind to place blame upon her. It was Betty. It was her way. She loved him. She had told him so. Yet she was fond of admiration, and the conquest of Hugh appealed to her with a potent fascination. It was Hugh's fault, not Betty's, that these disquieting things came into John's life. The old swift anger arose in John's bosom at the thought.

It swept him out of his self-control when he met Hugh. They came together unexpectedly on the way into L'Anguille the next Saturday afternoon. John Kenadie obeyed his first impulse when he saw Hugh riding some distance ahead of him. He called out to him, an undisguised hostility in his voice.

Hugh checked his horse's easy lope.

"What do you want?" he asked. "What is it, John Kenadie?"

John smiled ominously. "I want a word with you."

"I'm listening," Hugh replied.

"You've got to leave Betty Thorndike alone," announced John, his eyes fixed on Hugh's. "I give you fair warning. I love Betty. You shall not come between us. Do you understand?"

Hugh's right hand rested lazily on his hip. He moved it slightly backward. John was riding at his left.

"Are you engaged to be married to Betty?" Hugh asked.

"That's my business, not yours," said John.

"Has she promised to marry you?"

"It's her business and mine whether she has or not."

Hugh laughed now.

"I'll tell you," he said, "when I'll leave Betty alone."

John's eyes still held his.

"I'll leave her alone," he continued, "when she asks me to leave her alone. Not before. When she says the word. Not when you say it."

They were riding side by side.

"What right have you," asked Hugh, "to tell me that I must leave Betty Thorndike alone? You have no right."

"I am not claiming any right," replied John. "I am warning you. I have loved Betty Thorndike all my life. If you come between us I mean to kill you. I want you to understand this."

"I intend to come between you if I can," said Hugh. A slight turn of his right wrist was revealed by the motion of his coat. "While we're understanding things, you might as well understand that. I intend to come between you if I can."

"My warning holds good that very minute," John responded. "I shall kill you or you'll have to kill me. Take your hand off your pistol."

Hugh obeyed by drawing the weapon and resting it across his saddle.

At this John Kenadie smiled again.

"I have not threatened to murder you," he said. "If we ever have to shoot, it'll be a fair shooting match, not a murder. You're in no danger now."

"I know that," replied Hugh. "I'm ready, that's why."

John Kenadie's face grew grim.

"Be sure you're ready at the right time. If the day ever comes that Betty Thorndike casts me off for you, that'll be the day when you need to be ready."

Then he rode ahead of Hugh and made his way alone into town.

It was Hugh's fault, not Betty's.

Yet, surely, Betty was under her evil stars. The old contrary fondness for Hugh held her in its perilous grip. It was so strong as even to frighten Betty herself. She saw the danger of it.

Hugh pressed her hard. That masterful way of his, which had so often drawn her from John, who

was as wax in her fingers, appealed to her now as never before.

"Some day, Miss Betty," Hugh said to her, "I'm going to tell you a plain truth about you and me! I can feel the day coming!"

He had called on her and was leaving.

"What is it?" asked Betty, her eyes dancing. "Is it anything very terrible?"

"No," answered Hugh calmly, "it's very nice. I've told you the first half of it before now!"

This shaping of Hugh's speech deceived Betty. She was not led to remember the day of the picnic.

"What was it you told me?" she asked curiously. "If you told me anything important, I've forgotten it."

"Good!" cried Hugh. "That wipes it all out. We can begin new!"

Betty looked at him wonderingly.

"What was it?" she asked again. "What was it, Hugh?"

In a flash she understood.

"I told you once that I loved you," said Hugh boldly.

His bearing was dominant.

"That was the first half of it," he continued, a certain recklessness in his tone. "I'll tell you the second half some day, as sure as I live!"

Anger should have been in Betty's blush. It was not.

The very insolence of Hugh's manner almost

conquered her. She knew this in her soul. Yet she was piqued into a mad curiosity.

"I remember the first half," her lips curling, but most because of a tempting smile. "You might as well tell me the second half now as any other time. What is it?"

Hugh laughed at her.

"I'll tell you," he replied, "if you'll answer me one question. Which one of the two of us, me or John Kenadie, do you like best?"

Betty felt the reproach of this question.

Yet she was not equal to Hugh's masterfulness even then. He stood with his head lifted high, his yellow hair thrown carelessly back, his defiant blue eyes daring her to do her worst. Betty felt herself blushing furiously.

"I shan't tell you!" she said, feeling shamed for John's sake that she was so weak. "I shan't tell you! It is a foolish question!"

"When you are ready to answer it," calmly replied Hugh, "I'll tell you the other half of what I began the day of the picnic!"

Then he smiled provokingly at her as he went away.

It was dangerous for Betty, this cool wooing.

John Kenadie was even then hearing good news. Two letters came to old Gilbert Rolfe. The first was from the magazine editor. It said that John's printed poems had won much favor in the best quarters. Because of this there would be another

installment presented in the next issue. The second letter was from the publisher to whom the old schoolmaster had recently written. It was keenly appreciative. The writer was willing to undertake the publication of John Kenadie's poems in book form.

Yet John's heart was heavy within him when it should have sung for joy. He had almost quarreled with Betty at their last meeting. For the first time in their lives he found himself able to blame her for the lightness of her conduct with Hugh.

"It is wrong, Betty!" he cried at last. "You are not fair to me. You say you love me. You are behaving with Hugh exactly as if you had said the same thing to him!"

Betty's temper took fire at this accusation.

"You're going too far, John!" she replied hotly. "You'd better be careful. I won't be responsible for what I do if you talk to me like that. I have n't given you the right to do it, yet!"

John thought he could see the end of it all. And he loved Betty so dearly!

It was at this unhappy time that Mrs. Faulkner came.

## XIX

### A CASUAL DISCOVERY

BETTY called to John as he was passing her gate. Then she came down the garden path to meet him. It filled his heart with a sudden mad hope. There had been an angry coldness between them of late. John was hungering for the sweet Betty of old times. It was revealed in his eyes now.

"Mrs. Faulkner is here. I want to introduce you."

The words were a disappointment to John.

It was nothing to him that Mrs. Faulkner was calling on Betty or that he was to meet her. He knew all about her, of course, as did every one in L'Anguille by now. She was the beautiful young wife of a wealthy cotton buyer in New Orleans. She owned, by inheritance from her father, the largest cotton plantation in the L'Anguille lowlands. She went abroad with her husband every year, it being necessary for him to visit the English mills whose spindles he supplied with cotton. She was coming to L'Anguille for the first time in her life to inspect her plantation property. Her coming had been excitedly discussed by L'Anguille folk for some time. Now she was here.

John resented the fact. He had thought that Betty called him because she wanted to make up with him. Now Betty was almost formal with him. He would rather not have met Mrs. Faulkner.

With the unfriendly thought in his mind he went to meet her.

"Mrs. Faulkner," said Betty, "let me introduce John Kenadie. I was just going to tell you about him. Here he is!"

A pair of cool gray eyes met John's. They were calm and pure.

"How do you do, Mr. Kenadie?" their owner said. The voice was singularly satisfactory to John's ear. He had dreamed of such voices in reading of the fine women of cities. It suggested culture and a knowledge of beautiful things.

"Are you lucky or unlucky in coming before Betty told me about you?" asked Mrs. Faulkner. "What would she have told me, Mr. Kenadie?"

"I do not know," answered John. He was looking straight into the stranger's gray eyes. They widened at the sound of his voice. Mrs. Faulkner had expected the L'Anguille lowland speech. John's was more refined and of a somewhat weary intonation. He appreciated the gray eyes and the well-bred air, but he was regretting that Betty was not alone.

"Let us hope for the best then," smiled Mrs. Faulkner. She was studying John curiously. He was not of the L'Anguille type.

So secluded had been John's life till now that Mrs. Faulkner was the first woman of high training who had ever come into it. He knew that she must be an exquisite example of such women. She was so daintily clothed. Her glance was so steady and so frank. A womanly distinction of peculiar note was in her bearing. She was quite tall for a woman. Her face, oval and olive, was suggestive of intense vitality. John saw her completeness and eminence as a type. The artist in his temperament commanded him to confess the charm of her physical presence.

"Anyway," he replied, "I'm glad she has n't told you."

Mrs. Faulkner laughed.

"'The story of John Kenadie'?" questioningly.  
"Is it so bad?"

They were passing slowly from the garden to take seats on the shady gallery. Mrs. Faulkner noticed idly that the tall young countryman at her side carried a good figure remarkably well and that it was an earnest and tranquil face looking down into hers.

"'John Kenadie'?" she said again, seating herself in a homely but comfortable willow rocker of tempting laziness. "Why, do you know, that's the name of a new magazine poet who seems to have made a sudden success here lately. It's the same name, exactly!"

John's eyes had followed a movement of Betty's.

Mrs. Faulkner smiled.

"Strange to say," she continued, making conversation, "his songs were of the cotton country, too!"

"It's a sweethearts' quarrel," she thought to herself.

John had turned to her with grave politeness.

"That's quite remarkable, is n't it?" asked Mrs. Faulkner, liking him for the love of Betty in his eyes. "Of the same name, and, it may be, of very much the same surroundings. John Kenadie's poems could well have been written of this very neighborhood. Just think, Mr. Kenadie, you might have written them yourself if you had been born a poet!"

"I did write them, Mrs. Faulkner," said John simply. "Yet you don't know how strange it seems to hear any one speak of them."

Mrs. Faulkner suddenly sat up straight in the rocker.

"You!" she exclaimed. "You!"

John's glance came back from Betty's face to Mrs. Faulkner's.

Now Mrs. Faulkner blamed the girl.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Kenadie," gently, "for appearing so surprised. There is no reason, of course, why you should not have written the poems. I merely took it for granted that it was another John Kenadie. So your words astonished me at first."

She was studying John with the candid eyes of

a woman of the world. He stood the scrutiny fairly well. It pleased Mrs. Faulkner.

"I might have known better!" she cried, smiling quite cordially. "Since you are John Kenadie of the poems," she laughed, "I must tell you how much I liked them. They seemed to me as if they might have come from the very soil itself. Just nature songs, one might say, with no need of any special singer for their singing. And is n't that one of the distinctions of an elemental poet, Mr. Kenadie?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Faulkner," John confessed humbly. "I think you must know more about such things than I do. It makes me feel certain that you would enjoy meeting Mr. Rolfe, my old teacher, who is more of your world than I am. He encouraged me to write. It would be a great delight to him if he could know you. He is a true scholar."

John's face was quick to light up with pleasure at the thought of a meeting between old Gilbert Rolfe and this cultured woman. He knew intuitively the charm which she would possess for the old Virginian, used in his younger days to the society of such women.

"Indeed?" and Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes laughed at John, noting his quick illumination of expression. "Your old teacher, who first knew you to be a poet? You don't know how interesting this is to me, Mr. Kenadie! Tell me about him!"

Then she turned to Betty with a smile.

"You can make him tell me all about it, Betty, I am sure! How could you keep quiet yourself, with this great piece of literary news waiting to be told? A poet right here at your beck and call, indeed!"

Betty laughed at Mrs. Faulkner's pretty vehemence. The girl was much taken with this genuinely winning woman, married and some few years her senior, and knowing many refining things.

"I was about to tell you of John," innocently, "when he came, and then, of course, there was no use. Yet not about his poems, I'm afraid. Somehow, I should not have thought of them, I reckon."

Mrs. Faulkner's eyes were full of amusement.

"Of course, Betty," she laughed, "you would never have thought to tell me about his poems. That would n't have entered your mind at all. You don't know, perhaps, how natural it is that you, familiar with the fact, should overlook such a detail!"

Something in the lightly spoken words disturbed Betty.

"I like John's poems very much, Mrs. Faulkner! I think they are mighty pretty, and I am very fond of verses. But — but — can't you see? I have known John nearly all my life. It does n't make any difference to me whether he is a poet or not. He is just John Kenadie!"

There was genuine merriment in Mrs. Faulkner's laugh.

"It is deliciously natural, the whole thing is, Betty. You need not explain. It could not be otherwise!"

Then she turned to John Kenadie.

"Tell me all about this Mr. Rolfe of yours."

John Kenadie gladly obeyed her.

Feeling certain of a keen sympathy and an instant understanding, he told a graphic little story. It was filled with enlightening pictures as he went along. Through it all there shone, unsuspected by John, the deep love existing between him and old Gilbert Rolfe.

"I shall like your Mr. Rolfe!" announced Mrs. Faulkner at the close.

Her gray eyes had rested on the speaker's face with a pretty steadfastness. The genuine quality of her interest was not to be doubted. Once or twice she smiled at some unconscious cleverness of John's speech.

"I shall like him," she repeated. "He's a very dear old man."

The evident sincerity of the utterance pleased John Kenadie. He liked Mrs. Faulkner because of it.

"I mean to tell Mr. Rolfe all about you, Mrs. Faulkner. I am going to see him to-night."

"Make him like me in return then," requested Mrs. Faulkner. "That will be only fair, because

you have made it impossible for me not to like him. Will you?"

There was no touch of trifling in her manner. It carried a delicate suggestion that she felt herself the elder of the two. She was faintly familiar, as with a sudden friendliness that need not be disguised.

The young man smiled softly at her quaint request.

"I can promise you that, Mrs. Faulkner!" he replied. "Mr. Rolfe will cotton to you just as you have to him!"

"That's good!" exclaimed Mrs. Faulkner, her eyes gleaming. The homeliness of John's words amused her,—also his refreshing failure to attempt a compliment.

"What do you and Mr. Rolfe do when you get together?" she asked. "Don't think I'm rude. I'm only honestly curious!"

John Kenadie felt the infection of her friendliness.

"I'll tell you the plain truth!" he answered smilingly. "We spend the time talking about how fine it will be when my book comes out. You know, Mr. Rolfe has found a publisher who is willing to publish my songs in book form, and since then we've just been wondering how they'll look and what the world will say about them!"

"That's a very pretty picture," came Mrs. Faulkner's comment. "You need n't worry, Mr.

Kenadie. The world will like your poems immensely."

"Thank you, ma'am," said John.

Mrs. Faulkner flushed oddly at his employment of the old-fashioned country title. So unaccustomed was its sound to her ears now, that it conveyed only a suggestion that John Kenadie felt himself to be addressing a woman who was his senior in years. It was all very well for her to play prettily at being the elder, but he need not return the lead. Then she remembered and laughed.

"Betty," she said, placing her hand on the girl's with a caressing touch, "I'm going now, at last. I've paid you a dreadful visit, have n't I, honey? I should have gone away so properly soon after Mr. Kenadie came!"

"Why, no, Mrs. Faulkner!" cried Betty quickly. "Don't you remember that I called John in to meet you? He was on his way into L'Anguille, I know, and would n't have stopped at all if I had n't called him. Would you, John?"

It seemed to John that Betty shrank from the likelihood of being left alone with him. The thought hurt him deeply.

"No, Miss Betty," he answered. "I hadn't thought of stopping, because I was going into town. Yet I'm mighty glad you did call me, and I can go now just as well as earlier."

Mrs. Faulkner had risen. At John's words she smiled.

"Then, Mr. Kenadie," she said. "If you are going anyway, you may ride beside the carriage and answer a lot more of my questions. I want to know a thousand things about you!"

"I shall be very glad," replied John.

Betty accompanied them to the gate. She laughed and chatted with them as John assisted Mrs. Faulkner into her overseer's carryall. Then, as they went away in company, Betty waved her hand to them.

John was bending from his saddle to talk with Mrs. Faulkner. Betty did not know if he saw her little signal.

## XX

### A POET UNDER INSPECTION

"YOU sit a horse very well indeed, Mr. Kenedie," said Mrs. Faulkner, with her air of being the elder.

"I've been riding since I was knee-high," replied John.

"Are you fond of horses?"

"I like a horse better than anything else in the world, I reckon."

"Indeed?" There was a little laugh of friendly raillery. "Now, it seems to me, there are other things you care for more. Betty, for instance?"

John flushed and looked at Mrs. Faulkner in masculine protest.

"That is n't fair!" he said, smiling. "I was not thinking of people when I answered your question."

"Oh! Then I beg your pardon. Yet I was right about Betty, I see!"

"I expect that's plain for anybody to see," John confessed humbly. "I'm sorry it is, but I can't help it!"

"Betty is a very sweet girl," continued Mrs. Faulkner. "I loved her the minute I laid eyes

on her the other day. You could n't have found a sweeter girl than Betty."

The young man's eyes grew prideful for Betty's sake.

"Do you mind my being curious about you?" asked Mrs. Faulkner.

Her gaze was very frank. John returned it in kind.

"I don't mind it in the least," he answered. "It's a great compliment, Mrs. Faulkner, that you want to know anything at all about me. Because you — you are so — so finished — so unlike us here, I mean; I reckon we're just plain country-jakes to you!"

Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes lit up suddenly.

"You must n't talk in that way," gently. "Besides, I was speaking of you, not of any one else. While the country is all through and through you, you're anything but a country-jake!"

"I have lived in the country all my life," John explained. "I have never known anything but the country."

"What are you?" bluntly asked Mrs. Faulkner, always studying John's face. "I mean, are you a lawyer, doctor, merchant — that's like the old button-counting game, is n't it?" She laughed.

"I am a cotton planter," John replied. "That is, Mrs. Faulkner, I manage my mother's farm for her. I plant and plough cotton, and see that it's picked and ginned and baled and shipped to Mem-

phis and sold. I've been chopping down trees on some bottom-land we own, a mile or so down on the L'Anguille, this season. It's going to be good cotton land."

Mrs. Faulkner looked at the speaker curiously.

"That's what makes you so big and strong then," she commented, "all that manly work out in the open fields and woods. But you're a funny poet!"

John glanced at her in surprise.

"I don't believe I know exactly what you mean," he ventured. "I was telling you how I make my living."

Mrs. Faulkner blushed and then laughed.

"I mean it's funny for a poet to be doing things like those you mentioned," she explained apologetically,—"planting and ploughing and ginning cotton, and cutting down trees!"

"Robert Burns did that sort of work," said John.

Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes opened wide. The simplicity of John Kenadie was an enlightenment to her.

"You and Betty went to school together, did n't you?" she asked, with a woman's irrelevancy.

"Yes, ma'am," answered John.

"Will you do me a favor, Mr. Kenadie?" requested Mrs. Faulkner. "Please don't say 'ma'am' to me!"

John flushed to the roots of his hair.

"That's just what makes me feel like a country-jake!" in quick embarrassment. "I know you

want to laugh, Mrs. Faulkner! It must sound funny to you! But all of us here in L'Anguille say 'ma'am' in talking to a married woman. It's country politeness."

"And you're much more polite than I am," confessed Mrs. Faulkner, an honest little look of shame in her eyes. "I ought not to have said so rude a thing. Yet—please don't, if you can help it, Mr. Kenadie. I don't like it when you say 'ma'am' to me!"

"I'll try my best not to," said John. "It's a habit, though!"

"Were you sweethearts at school?" Mrs. Faulkner asked.

John started. Then he smiled.

"Betty and I?" he said. "Yes, Mrs. Faulkner. I fell in love with Betty the first time I ever saw her!"

"And you've never been in love with any one else," commented Mrs. Faulkner. "I know. That would be your way. Is n't it so?"

"It certainly is, Mrs. Faulkner," John acknowledged. "I don't believe I could live without loving Betty."

A peculiarly tender look came into Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes as they studied John's face.

"And Betty?" she asked. "Is she good to you? Or does she take advantage of your constancy? Women do, sometimes, you know!"

"When they love the man?" inquired John

desperately. He told his whole story in his question. Mrs. Faulkner nodded, her eyes very soft.

"Because they love him, it seems to me," answering him. "It is a woman's way to torture the man she loves. Curious, is n't it, Mr. Kenadie?"

"It seems so to me," replied John in all sincerity.

At this Mrs. Faulkner laughed heartily.

"You poor fellow!" she cried. She was looking at John approvingly. "You are having a hard time with Betty, I know. Yet I 'm sure she must love you."

John made no reply to this assertion.

"She surely loves you," Mrs. Faulkner repeated softly.

Then she changed the topic.

"I want you to bring old Mr. Rolfe to call on me," she said suddenly, smiling at John. "Will you?"

"Indeed, I will, Mrs. Faulkner!" John cried gratefully. "It will be such a pleasure to him! I thank you very much!"

The young man's manner was full of the most honest flattery.

"I am staying at the 'great house' on my plantation," continued Mrs. Faulkner. "Andy Birdsong, my overseer, and his wife have been taking care of it for me, you know. I shall write you a note telling you when to bring Mr. Rolfe. I shall ask Betty, too, Mr. Kenadie."

There was a laugh in the gray eyes at mention of Betty.

"Mr. Rolfe and I will be very glad to come," John responded. He lifted his hat with an old-fashioned politeness. It tickled Mrs. Faulkner secretly.

Then for a little time thereafter she talked of things which she seemed to know would please John Kenadie. Her talk was of certain worthy books she had read, and something of those who had written them; then a hint of good music and of plays and of noble pictures. It was the gentle talk of a woman of the world who knew and loved its better things. To John Kenadie, who was silent most of the time, it was a keen delight. When they came to where their roads parted, Mrs. Faulkner laughed.

"Now I can't tire you any more with such chatter!" she said. Nevertheless, she appreciated the relish with which John Kenadie had listened.

"Tire me, Mrs. Faulkner?" he exclaimed. "You could hardly understand what it all means to me! I have never known any one like you before. You don't know how good it is!"

The boyish fervor of the speech, coming so earnestly from this big and dreamful young countryman, appealed to Mrs. Faulkner. There was a pretty color in her delicate and yet vital face as she smiled her approval of the speaker.

"When you come with Mr. Rolfe," she said,

"you must talk to me of your own work. You must believe that I am deeply interested in it. This is the truth."

"Thank you again, Mrs. Faulkner," John responded. "It is all so good of you. It seems to bring me into a new world, somehow!"

## XXI

### BETTY LEARNS A HARD LESSON

OLD Gilbert Rolfe's lameness, though it gave him a limp in walking, did not prevent his riding horseback.

It was always a delight to John Kenadie to see his old teacher in the saddle, so soldierly was the picture he presented. At such times it was John's way to imagine Gilbert Rolfe as he must have looked in war days, an artillery officer in gray uniform, going into action with his battery. Even now the grim face would be set straight to the front, the cool blue eyes shining just a bit with the unusual pleasure of horseback exercise.

"You never look so contented, Mr. Rolfe," John said, on the evening they rode out together to Mrs. Faulkner's, "as when you are in the saddle."

"I'm never so content as then," replied the old man. "It's the one thing I miss most in being poor — a good horse. For the rest of my life, my books are all I ever want."

Their call on Mrs. Faulkner was being made in response to a friendly little note from her to John, telling him also that Betty had promised to spend the night with her. Even her handwriting, John

thought, was a revelation of her gentle breeding,—a clear, strong, and yet prettily feminine script, with a suggestion of rapid easiness in its flowing lines.

Mrs. Faulkner met them at the door of the stately old plantation house, a negro man taking charge of their horses as they dismounted at the steps of the pillared portico.

If she had not already brought John Kenadie under the spell of her frank graciousness and charm of manner, her reception of Gilbert Rolfe would in itself have made a lifelong friend of him. She went at once to the old teacher, her hands outstretched, a little smile lighting her face, her gray eyes filled with liking.

"I am so glad you came, Mr. Rolfe!" she cried, deference in her tone; "it was good of you to come!"

The old gentleman bent his white head with a quaint air of gallantry as he took her hands in his. He smiled and lifted them slightly. It was as if he had kissed them.

"Madam," he said, "it means a very great and unusual pleasure to me, for which I thank you. You were kind to ask me."

Mrs. Faulkner's eyes were soft with appreciation.

"I wished so much to know you, I made Mr. Kenadie promise me that I should. He assured me you would not mind coming with him when he came to see me."

John Kenadie laughed.

"It's mighty good of you to put it that way, Mrs. Faulkner," he interposed. Then he turned, to the old schoolmaster. "The fact is, Mr. Rolfe, I'm here myself only because I bring you!"

Mrs. Faulkner smiled.

"You're here to see Betty!" she retorted. "I took pains to offer you more than the privilege of seeing me only. You ought to be more grateful, Mr. Kenadie!"

John flushed at this. He had been wondering if Betty would come back to her old dear self this night. They were still haplessly and vaguely at odds. Hugh was giving Betty no rest.

"There's Betty, now!" cried Mrs. Faulkner, smiling.

It was Betty on the stairway in one of her prettiest gowns. She came down the wide steps, halting, of design, at the landing where the stairs turned. An antique, cherry-cased colonial clock, taller than she, seemed to tick out a proud note of attention from her station of vantage. Mrs. Faulkner could not but see the eager and yet uneasy love that came into John's face at sight of the girl.

"Now tell Betty of your ingratitude, if you dare!" she cried. "Ah, you're ungrateful no longer, Mr. Kenadie!"

Then Betty came down to them.

"Ungrateful?" she asked lightly, "has John been ungrateful to you already, Mrs. Faulkner?"

Her hostess looked at Betty curiously.

"Why do you say 'already,' Betty?" she questioned quickly.

The girl tossed her head with a petulant air.

"Because he is quick to be ungrateful," she responded boldly. There was a swift glance at John from the corners of her eyes. "The more you give him, the more he demands. He is not easily satisfied!"

Mrs. Faulkner's brows were lifted slightly.

"I believe you are wrong," she remarked; "perhaps he only insists upon what is rightfully his."

The words caused Betty to flush with vexation.

Mrs. Faulkner had put her hand on Gilbert Rolfe's sleeve and led the way into the old-fashioned parlor.

"You are not fair to me, Betty," said John quietly. They were alone for just a moment. "I have been patient. I have not asked you for anything that you could give unwillingly."

Mrs. Faulkner's little shaft was still rankling in Betty's mind.

"You are too jealous!" she charged, "you know it!"

"I am not jealous if you prefer Hugh to me." John spoke gravely. "You have the right to do that. But you have no right to play with me. If you were mistaken — if you care more for Hugh, you should tell me the truth. It is all that I ask of you — now!"

Betty's eyes flashed.

"I will think it over!" she cried angrily. "Since you insist upon it, I will decide if I have made a mistake!"

She turned on him defiantly.

"If I have," she said, "I promise that I will tell you!"

John made no reply.

Because of Betty's ominous humor he was glad, in the evening which followed their meeting and the informal Southern supper which almost immediately succeeded it, that Mrs. Faulkner was very kind to him. She led him to talk freely of his work in letters, and was genuinely interested. It was a new and delightful experience for him, this friendly communion with a woman who could tell him so many helpful things and lead him to see so clearly what his own gift might yet mean in his life. A strange and beautiful world opened up before his eyes.

After a time Mrs. Faulkner returned John to Betty and devoted herself to old Gilbert Rolfe.

Here, with an entire frankness not possible before, she revealed to the schoolmaster in how rare estimation she held those poems of John's which had appeared in the Eastern magazine. She let it be seen, also, that she finely appreciated Gilbert Rolfe's own hand in the making of John Kenadie. It was a delicate revelation, this of hers, and through it all the schoolmaster delighted in the woman herself, the sincerity, the sweetness of

her, the love of good and true things that he himself loved. Her feminine charm and kindly spirit won him. It was a sudden realization of his pathetic loneliness which had impelled Mrs. Faulkner to set herself to the winning.

The old schoolmaster and his hostess became excellent friends in a marvelously brief time. Just before Mrs. Faulkner saw reason for once more making the conversation general she leaned towards Gilbert Rolfe, smiling.

"I once knew such a delightful old lady, Mr. Rolfe," she said, "who may be kin of yours. She is a Mrs. Robertson. Her husband is, I believe, on the Supreme Bench of Virginia. I met her one summer at the White Sulphur. I had gone there just to know the famous old place, and this dear Mrs. Robertson seemed to take to me because of my interest in it. She told me something of her girlhood, as sweet old women love to do sometimes, when she was a Miss Eleanor Rolfe. She was a very delightful old lady!"

"A very delightful old lady!" softly repeated Mr. Rolfe, a marvelous tenderness coming into his grim face; "you can never know, my dear Mrs. Faulkner, how strangely those words sound to me, spoken of her. The last time I saw her she was eighteen years old. She was my second cousin, Mrs. Faulkner, my cousin Eleanor. I was very much in love with her in those days."

Mrs. Faulkner saw in a flash that old Gilbert

Rolfe was giving her his confidence, possibly as he had never before done with any one. A great softness and understanding was in her eyes.

"You were, indeed, in love with her, Mr. Rolfe," she said gently, "because you have loved her ever since."

The speech was not impertinent as it came from Mrs. Faulkner. Gilbert Rolfe glanced at her quickly. The sympathy and truthfulness in her gray eyes moved him to reach out and touch her hand. It was as if he were grateful to her.

"You see very clearly, Mrs. Faulkner," he said, smiling as only the old can smile when life's dead and gone dreams are revived in memory. "For so young a woman, you see very clearly. We were engaged to be married, my Cousin Eleanor and I, and we quarreled. There was no question of our loving one another, but Eleanor was a high-spirited girl, and before I could bring myself to take the initiative in making up the quarrel, as I should have done, she engaged herself to Mr. Robertson. Not long after, she was married to him. And that is all, dear Mrs. Faulkner."

Mrs. Faulkner bent her head in answer.

That was all. She felt the pathos of it when Gilbert Rolfe's calm voice was silent. It accounted for his loneliness and his poverty and his willing obscurity. That was all.

Then, swiftly passing her hand across her eyes, Mrs. Faulkner turned to John and Betty.

"Come, you two young people!" she cried lightly, "if that window glimpse into the night has n't done enough for both of you, I mean to sing you some of my loveliest songs!"

John Kenadie responded with a swift glance of surprised delight noted by Betty in secret resentment. His love for music was a passion, starved of its best though his life had been. He hungrily eyed Mrs. Faulkner as she left the room. When she returned with a guitar, laughing, John's dark face was radiant.

"I found it in the attic the other day," she explained smilingly. "It's a very sweet old guitar, too. I prefer my piano when I sing, but, unfortunately, my piano is in New Orleans, not here!"

Then, simply, she began singing to them.

Her voice was a velvety contralto, with fire and passion and something of sadness in its tones. It had been masterfully trained. John Kenadie did not know that the little love song which she chose to sing first was world-famous, but he held it in his heart thereafter as his supremest musical memory. From it she drifted into another, and then another. They were simple, great songs of the later composers, known familiarly to her, but virgin new to John Kenadie and to the two listening with him.

It was the one thing, this singing of Mrs. Faulkner's, which should not have come into John's life at such a crisis. Betty was trying him beyond his strength. Mrs. Faulkner's sympathetic compre-

hension, her beauty, the charm of her, stirred him to new and strange emotion. Her voice in singing cried to his very soul.

Betty's eyes were shining with tears as Mrs. Faulkner sounded the final note of a little gypsy serenade of quaint sorrowfulness and yearning. John Kenadie sat gazing at her with a puzzling look in his eyes. He felt a great throb of wistful self-reproach even as he turned, rapt, towards Mrs. Faulkner.

Poor little Betty, who had been his sweetheart all his life, whom he had loved so simply and dearly from the days of his boyhood. Poor little Betty!

"They were marvelously beautiful, your songs, Mrs. Faulkner," said old Gilbert Rolfe. "I have not heard such singing for many years. You have a rare voice."

"It is my great vanity," answered Mrs. Faulkner, with a pretty frankness. "No one ever need thank me for singing. I find such pleasure in it myself, you know!"

"It is not surprising," commented Gilbert Rolfe gravely. After a moment's pause he spoke again. "I do not know if he has mentioned it himself, but John, here, has a good baritone voice and loves to sing."

John Kenadie had risen and stood at the window, looking out into the country night. He turned as Mr. Rolfe spoke. His face showed pale in the half light where he stood.

"Please don't, Mr. Rolfe," he interposed quietly. "It is almost a sin to speak of my voice when we have been listening to Mrs. Faulkner's."

There was a strange softness in his utterance of Mrs. Faulkner's name.

"Nothing of the sort!" she laughed. "If there's one voice I love above another, it's a baritone! That's the woman in me, I suppose. Come, Mr. Kenadie, what do you sing?"

John blushed deeply. Then he laughed.

"I sing nigger songs, Mrs. Faulkner," he replied,—"old camp-meeting hymns, and the songs they sing in the fields, and the songs the nigger roustabouts sing steamboating on the river. I pick the banjo for my accompaniment!"

There was a shamed bitterness in his words.

"Won't you sing one or two of them?" Mrs. Faulkner asked. She was secretly marveling at the change in his manner. "I should like so much to hear them, Mr. Kenadie."

John answered almost roughly.

"No, Mrs. Faulkner, I would n't sing one of my backwoods nigger songs before you for all the money in the world!"

It was a boyish speech in its awkward abruptness, yet, for some reason, Mrs. Faulkner liked it. She laughed at John, looking straight into his abashed eyes.

"All the same," she retorted, "I mean to make you sing for me some day. I have an idea your voice is worth while."

When old Gilbert Rolfe and John were leaving she again rallied him as he held her hand in his.

"Don't forget, Mr. Kenadie," she said, "you owe me a song!"

That night, when Mrs. Faulkner kissed Betty and left her alone in her room, the girl knelt beside the bed sobbing, her face buried in her arms.

She had seen the truth in John's eyes.

"It will break my heart!" Betty sobbed. "He could not do such a thing if I had been good to him! I have driven him to it! I was too sure of his love! Oh, John, dear John, I'm so sorry! I love you so—I love you so!"

## XXII

### THE TRUTH AND A WARNING

FOLLOWING the night at Mrs. Faulkner's, three miserable days were passed by Betty at her own home. Each day she was hoping that John would come and that some happy turn of fate might bring them again into the old relationship. It was a weary time for Betty.

John did not come. Hugh came instead.

Betty was glad to see even Hugh. It meant a relief to her soul, tired of self-reproaching. At least, Hugh would be good and kind and comforting to talk with.

It was Saturday afternoon and she saw him come to the gate. She hurried down the garden path to welcome him. Her pleasure at his coming was revealed in her face.

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried, in a little spirit of abandon pitiful for its cause. "You don't know how welcome you are! I have been so lonely! You wouldn't believe how lonely I've been, Hugh!"

"Why, Miss Betty!" exclaimed Hugh wonderingly. "The idea of you being lonely of all people! I thought you were always on the go and

having a good time! I can hardly believe my ears!"

Hugh's very manner was full of flattery. It was never more welcome to Betty. She beamed her gratitude on him. That he should have mistaken the meaning of it all was but natural.

"I've been lonely, anyway, Hugh!" Betty answered. "It's mighty good of you to come and cheer me up at just the right time. I'm going to put a great big credit mark opposite your name just for doing it!"

Hugh laughed at the words. He was studying Betty.

"I hope it isn't the first credit mark you've given me, Miss Betty," he smiled. "I'd like to have a good account with you."

"You have!" gratefully. "You've done lots of nice things for me, Hugh. This is the very best of all but one. The time you saved my life is the best, of course!"

"Even if John Kenadie didn't like my doing it?" asked Hugh banteringly. "You mus'n't forget that, Betty. He was awful mad about it, if you remember, Betty!"

A pang of sudden pain touched Betty's heart. John had loved her then, when he had quarreled with Hugh for saving her life. He was jealous because he loved her. Now he did not love her!

Hugh leaned towards Betty, his face very earnest.  
"All those credit marks you've given me, Miss

Betty," he said, his voice unsteady, "do they amount to very much in my favor? I'd like to have them to count on when I ask you for something in return. Will you remember them then, Miss Betty?"

"Of course I will!" cried Betty impulsively. "They'll count for a lot, I can tell you!"

"Then I'll put it to the test!" Hugh Latham spoke. "I love you, Betty! Won't you promise to be my wife?"

Oh, how humbly John Kenadie had asked her that very question! The recollection came to Betty like a sudden hurt. It was all Hugh's fault that she had dealt so lightly with John!

"Hugh!" she exclaimed, her eyes swiftly cold and resentful. "I have not said that you could ask me such a question! I told you once that you must never speak to me like this again. It is not fair for you to do it now, just because I was so glad to see you! You know it is n't fair!"

Betty's quick change of manner cut Hugh to the quick. He might have interpreted her words less seriously. The look in her eyes, however, was not to be misunderstood. It angered Hugh.

"Betty," he said sternly, "I'm tired of your fooling with me the way you've been doing all along. I'm not patient by nature. I've had little use for girls until you came back home. I did not want to fall in love with you then. You made me do it. You know you did. Now you shan't play

fast and loose with me as you like. I'm not the sort of man a woman can whistle to whenever she wants to have a little fun with him, and then drive him away like he was a dog! You know I'm not!"

The words were vehemently spoken. They frightened Betty. "Hugh!" she cried, "what have I done that you talk so to me?"

"What have you done, Betty?" repeated Hugh. "You know as well as I do what you've done. You've made me fall in love with you. You've been first hot and then cold. You've turned your back on me for John Kenadie, and then you've turned your back on John Kenadie for me. You've had your fun with me, Betty, as nobody on God's earth could have had but you. You won't either take me or let me go. That's what you've done, Betty. It ain't fair! It ain't fair!"

The girl shrank away from him, crying.

"I have not!" she sobbed. "I have not! You're saying what is n't true. I've been good and friendly to you because we've known each other all our lives, and because you saved me from being run over. I've always liked you. I have not trifled with you. When you told me you loved me, did n't I tell you never to say anything like that to me again? You know I did, Hugh!"

"Yes, you did!" Hugh answered savagely. "Then you kept me off at arm's length for a while,

as you had a right to do. You ought to have held me off always. Yet you did n't. I don't know what possessed you, Betty, but you called me back to you. You seemed to care for me, and yet afraid to say that you did. I was glad to come back to you. It gave me a chance, Betty. It might be that you would find out it was me you loved, and I was n't going to lose that chance. Then, just now, you met me as if you were so glad to see me! I can't wait any longer this way, Betty. I can't be fooled with like I was a child!"

"I was tired and lonesome, Hugh!" Betty cried. "You ought to know how girls are. You can't hold them responsible for all these little ways. I was longing for somebody to come,—somebody that I could laugh and talk with, somebody who would be good and friendly to me. You came, and I was glad! Glad because it meant company, and I wanted it. Because you came, then I ran to meet you and showed you how glad I was!"

It was an humble little explanation. It angered Hugh.

"I reckon that's so, Betty!" he said hotly. "It's your way. You were glad to see me. You'd have been gladder to see John Kenadie. He did n't come. It was me who came, and so you were almost as glad as if it had been him. You would play with me until you were cheered up again, or until John Kenadie came. Then you'd throw me over till the next time!"

It was a bitter speech. The girl listening remembered that she owed the losing of John to her foolish ways with Hugh,—John, who had loved her so dearly that she thought nothing could shake that love!

Betty turned on Hugh Latham suddenly.

“Anyway, you’ve told the truth now, Hugh!” she cried. “I would have been gladder to see John Kenadie — a thousand times gladder than I was to see you. If you did n’t know it before, it’s a good time for you to learn it now. I’d have been gladder to see him, I tell you! So glad that I think I should have fallen down on my knees and thanked God for seeing him!”

The words came with a rush. It was Betty’s confession.

“Now you know whether I’m fooling with you or not, Hugh!” she continued. “Now you know whether I’m playing hot and cold with you or not. Don’t ever let me fool you again, Hugh. It’ll be your own fault if you do. For I tell you God’s truth now. I love John Kenadie. I care more for his little finger than I do for your whole body. You’ve got no excuse for making any more mistakes about me, Hugh. I love John Kenadie! Do you hear what I tell you? I love John Kenadie!”

“Betty!” cried Hugh. “You don’t know what you are saying!”

Betty’s reply was a laugh.

"I will not believe you!" Hugh exclaimed vehemently. "It cannot be that you turn me away like this! You speak as if you hated me all of a sudden. You can't hate me, Betty. You have no reason for it. What have I done but fall in love with you? And you know you made me fall in love with you. You seemed to want me to love you even when we were boys and girls together at school. You were always provoking me to it. You had that same manner when I saw you on the boat the day you got back home from Memphis. It was daring me to fall in love with you. You were so pretty and sweet that day. I had grown up to be a man, and somehow it seemed to me that you surely cared more for me than for John, or else you would n't have looked at me so. Then, Betty, then, at last, you had your way and made me love you! And this is what it has come to. Oh, Betty, you ought to be ashamed — you ought to be ashamed — you ought to be ashamed!"

"I am ashamed!" sobbed Betty. "It is my fault, all my fault — you, and John, and — and everything! But I'm going to tell the truth now. I want you to go away from me. I love John, not you. I could not love you, I could not love any one but him, if I lived till the end of the world. So you must go away — oh, why do you stand there, waiting, after I have told you all these things?"

"Then this is the end, Betty?" asked Hugh, his face white with pain and a deadly anger. "This is the end, is it, Betty?"

"It is the end!" answered Betty. "It is all my fault. It's the end. And I am glad—glad—glad!"

Upon which Hugh Latham turned and went to where his horse was waiting, and mounted and galloped madly away. He had no destination fixed in his mind. He was thinking only of John Kenadie. The time was come for him to have a settlement with the man for whom Betty had cast him aside. John had threatened him once. He would do more than threaten John.

So he galloped on, a fierce hatred of John Kenadie swelling in his heart. For an hour he kept the road through the woods. It suited him to be alone and to ride furiously. In this way he came to the plantation owned by Mrs. Faulkner. Here he checked his horse and took the short cut of a plantation road which would carry him near the house and so across to his own road home. The fall of his horse's hoofs on the soft dirt was noiseless. He was now moving at a walk.

Then, suddenly, Hugh Latham's glance rested on two figures in the wood. What he saw struck him white in the face and caused him cautiously to turn his horse back to the main road and there spur him into a swifter gallop than before, hurry-

ing again to Betty Thorndike with the meanest of passions degrading him to the doing of a base and cowardly thing.

“Betty,” he said, “I have something that you must hear about John Kenadie,—something that happened this day. You can never marry him!”

## XXIII

### A SIN AGAINST DEAR LOVE

"SINCE you are going to Mrs. Faulkner's anyway," said old Gilbert Rolfe to John, "I will ask you to return this book for me."

It was that same Saturday afternoon. The schoolmaster met John Kenadie on the road near the Prewitts' place. The young man, mounted, had announced whither he was bound. He did not tell Gilbert Rolfe of the strange agitation of soul which kept him from Betty and now sent him to Mrs. Faulkner. He hardly knew of its control himself. Yet he could not think of her without yielding to its influence.

"I shall be glad to do it, Mr. Rolfe," answered John gratefully. "It will give me an excuse for my visit."

The schoolmaster smiled.

"You do not need one," he commented. "She will be very glad to see you. Mrs. Faulkner is much interested in you."

A proud light sprang into John Kenadie's eyes.

"It is good for you to know such a woman," continued Gilbert Rolfe. "She will be infinitely stimulating to you. There is nothing better for

you than to know Mrs. Faulkner, and to have her like you and give you her companionship. She is capable of helping you greatly."

"I feel it already, Mr. Rolfe," confessed John honestly. "It is, somehow, as if she had awakened me to the full meaning of the world. Everything has looked different to me since I knew her!"

Old Gilbert Rolfe nodded his white head.

"Tell Mrs. Faulkner I advised you to come, if you think you need an excuse," again smiling. "She will know what I mean. Say also that I thank her for the pleasure which this book gave me. It is a volume of verse by an English poet, John, and Mrs. Faulkner wanted me to know the new school. Tell her that the man is a good workman, even though he works in a dangerous field and with dangerous weapons. She will laugh when she hears that."

"I'll tell her, sir," answered John Kenadie, "and, if I may, I'll take a peep into the book on the way to deliver it. A book of verse is a big temptation, Mr. Rolfe!"

"By all means glance at it!" agreed the schoolmaster. "You will be reading a master poet of the modern school, John!"

Then, with a good-by to Gilbert Rolfe, the young man rode on.

Mrs. Faulkner's name was written on the fly-leaf of the little book. It made the volume seem a part of her. John Kenadie began its reading with the

feeling that he was sharing something precious with Mrs. Faulkner. He had dropped the reins on the pommel of his saddle.

The songs were a revelation to John. They were personal and passionate cries to loved women or to one loved woman. The beauty of them was beyond acknowledgment in words. It was a dangerous singing, for with this charm of craftsmanship went the sting of a sexual worship which needs no stimulant. They were the songs of a city-bred poet, not possible to one of the countryside, because there was in them no love of nature in the woods and fields, but only the love of women. They were so true of their kind that John Kenadie, reading, heard the soul of the singer crying out to a woman, passionately, recklessly, abandoned to the thought of any act that should bring them together and keep them together. It moved him strangely.

Mrs. Faulkner came to meet him as he dismounted at her portico. She had been seated on the veranda, writing. There was no attempt to conceal her pleasure.

"I needed just such a visit!" she cried, laughing and giving him her hand. "I have been tiresomely busy all this day. Not busy with my own little personal affairs, which I don't mind, but with those of the plantation and with letters from lawyers. I feel sordid and mean after it all!"

She was dressed in a dark housekeeping gown so perfectly fitted that John marveled at the ex-

quisite lines of her figure. The joy of seeing her was in his face.

"I've never been rich," he replied, "but, somehow, it has always seemed to me that there must be a peck of trouble in keeping track of money and property. It won't let you rest easy, will it?"

"No, that's exactly it!" and Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes were smiling at him. "It masters you; you can't put it any distance away! When I'm at home it is n't so bad, but here, you know, this is part of my own estate and I have to attend to things. At home I promptly saddle them upon my husband."

Her very voice was filled with liking for her visitor.

"I'm glad money is so troublesome," said John gravely; "that is, to certain kinds of people. They are so much nicer for loving the better things. You, Mrs. Faulkner, for example. Would n't it be a great pity if it kept you from all the beautiful things you care for, the things really worth loving?"

The gray eyes were shining their approval at him.

"It shall not!" was their owner's smiling answer. "The things I love,—and they are good and beautiful things, even if I do have to indirectly praise myself,—I shall not let them be interfered with, Mr. Kenadie! Not for — what was that you said the other evening? — not for all the money in the world!"

John grew suddenly red at the reminiscence.

"You ought to forget my country awkwardness, Mrs. Faulkner!" he cried. "If you remember things that way it will make me more awkward than ever. I'm on pins and needles now, whenever I'm with you, just for fear of being countrified!"

Mrs. Faulkner laughed at this, looking at John through her dark lashes.

"Not all the thought in the world," she told him, "could make you anything but countrified! Why, Mr. Kenadie, Nature has set her seal all over you. You are the country incarnate!"

John laughed, still blushing.

"I did n't know it was so bad as that!" he exclaimed. "Yet, of course, I have to be as I was born and raised. Really, though, Mrs. Faulkner, I told you at first I was a country-jake, and since then, to spare you, I've tried to hide it as much as possible!"

"Ah, you know what I mean!" came Mrs. Faulkner's quick reply. "It's because you love the country so, not that you're a country-jake. You're a part of the country. It's in your very blood and soul. I can't imagine you as living in the city!"

"Still," said John regretfully, "I think I would like to, for a while. It seems to me I must have missed some of the most beautiful things in life; especially when I hear you talk of those things,

Mrs. Faulkner, of books and pictures and music and plays. I do love the country, I love it as if it were kin to me; but I should like to see some of the beautiful things of the cities!"

The gray eyes looking at him softened marvelously.

"I forgot," Mrs. Faulkner commented quietly. "You are really right about those things, Mr. Kenadie. It is a joy to know them. It would be such a delight to you that I should love to see you among them. Yet I should also love to know that after a little while you would be going back home to the country. Don't you understand what I mean? It would be good for you to learn of those things. Yet you should not stay long enough in towns to lose your country nature!"

"There is n't much danger!" smiled John. "I reckon I'll live and die right here in L'Anguille, raising cotton and talking about crops!"

"I'm not so sure of that!" came the quick retort. "How will it be when your book comes out and you're a famous poet?"

John Kenadie blushed furiously, reproach in his eyes.

"You're poking fun at me for sure now, Mrs. Faulkner! You ought n't to do that, either. It hurts!"

Again his boyishness seemed to appeal to Mrs. Faulkner.

"You know I would n't hurt you!" she said

softly. "You know that I spoke sincerely. I was very much in earnest, Mr. Kenadie. Your book of poems will make you famous. I know that from what I've seen and heard already. You will find yourself some day enjoying all those things of the cities that we've been talking about."

"I hope so," answered John Kenadie simply.  
"It would be like fairyland to me!"

Mrs. Faulkner looked at him curiously.

"You have never thought of the fairyland becoming real?"

John Kenadie shook his head.

"Not in any such way," he replied. "I've dreamed of my poems being published in a book by themselves, and thought of how Mr. Rolfe and I would get together and talk it all over. That was all."

Mrs. Faulkner laughed softly.

"You don't know how I like that! It is so true to you, and so sincere. Yet it would n't be possible, even to you, if you were not a country-bred man!"

"There you go again!" cried John desperately.

"Meaning no harm!" laughed Mrs. Faulkner. Then she looked at the little book which John had placed on the flat desk beside her letters.

"There 's a poet," she said, "who, I'm very sure, lacks your simplicity. It supports my theory, for he is purely a city-bred man."

"Mr. Rolfe asked me to tell you how much he

enjoyed reading the book," explained John. "I read some of it as I rode out here. The poems are very beautiful."

"Do you think so, really?" asked Mrs. Faulkner, surprise, not unmixed with amusement, in her gray eyes. "Now, mind you, I like them very much indeed, as poetry, but I should not think you would care for them!"

"Why should n't I care for them?" asked John Kenadie.

"For the best of reasons," answered Mrs. Faulkner with a quick frankness. "They're not at all of your school. They are over-refined in their literary style. They're decadent in spirit. They're songs to nothing but women — women — women!"

"Why should n't I care for them?" repeated John Kenadie.

"I have just told you. They are the one thing only, the cry of the eternal masculine!"

"Surely," responded John, almost wondering at her argument, "I am of the eternal masculine — I am a man."

Mrs. Faulkner had extended her hand to take up the book. She touched John Kenadie's, which rested on the desk. His was a big, well-shaped, strong hand.

"Just as you belong to the eternal feminine," he said, his voice suddenly shaken, "I belong to the eternal masculine."

A swift wave of color had swept over Mrs. Faulk-

ner's white throat and face. Her lips parted, as if she were about to speak. Then there was a little silence. It did not seem strange to either of them.

Mrs. Faulkner smiled.

"If you like them," and now her eyes were calm, "I'm going to ask you to read some of them to me. That will show me if you like them. Not here. I shall take you down to my favorite dreaming place just yonder under the trees and let you read them there."

It was a little open space of greensward, clear of trees and yet so shaded by them that only a few flickers of sunlight rested here and there on the grass. There was a hammock swung between two of the dogwoods on its edge. Mrs. Faulkner had given John her hand at one time as he turned to assist her over a brown old log. The grounds had not been well kept in the absence of an owner. She laughed as they reached the spot.

"I claim the hammock as my exclusive own!" she spoke, smiling. "I want you to read to me standing, like the poets of the good old days. Do you mind?"

"I don't mind a bit," answered John. "Only I know you will be laughing at me as I read to you!"

"I will be doing nothing of the kind!" cried Mrs. Faulkner. "You know better than that, Mr. Kenadie!"

Then she laughed. It was a girl's laugh.

"It will be easy, Mr. Kenadie!" her gray eyes filled with fun. "You can imagine that you are at old Mr. Rolfe's school again, a boy, reading your lesson to him. Stand over there now and begin!"

"I will not!" replied John, blushing. "I'll stand here, beside the hammock, where you'll have to mock me at close range. If you think I can read to you as if you were Mr. Rolfe, you're mighty badly mistaken. It's you I'll be reading to! You!"

"Then that will be much nicer, after all!" said Mrs. Faulkner.

John opened the book and, with a certain quaint earnestness, began to read one of its little songs.

The master charm of the poet from whom he was reading lay both in the melody and passionateness of his verse. For the music of rhyme and rhythm his ear was perfect. It made him supreme over other singers of his day. John Kenadie could not measure the quality of fire in the singing. He had not read ten lines, however, when the truth of most beautiful craftsmanship seized upon his soul.

It would have been impossible for him to have slighted such a singer by a slurring or blinded reading of his songs. John would have felt as if he were violating something exquisitely beautiful. Nor could he long remain senseless to the meaning of the singer. He stood close to Mrs. Faulkner

in the hammock, one of his hands resting upon its supporting strand, her intimate presence enveloping him. From the first tender little song he turned to another, and then to another.

The young man read ultimately with an entire abandonment to the passion and the perfect music of the verse. Sometimes he caught a swift glance from Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes, more eloquent than their owner knew. At another moment he would hear a quick indrawing of her breath or a sweet little cry of delight. It came to John as he read that there was a sequence in the singing. The songs followed one another in dramatic order. It was in consonance with the emotional growth of their thought. He came, finally, to one which seemed to utter a cry of supreme passion. Yet, suddenly and without warning, it ended in a quick and dreadful note of hopelessness. The woman to whom the poet was singing was beyond the possessing touch of his hands.

John Kenadie hurried, wondering and breathless, to the next. Then arose the proud voicing of a love possessed — possessed at any cost, at the price of some great sin, but won, nevertheless, for the enriching of a life which cared not for any penalty that might follow. It was supreme singing.

He suddenly closed the little book. It was so unexpectedly done that Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes had no faintest chance to veil the truth that was

shining from them. In a madness of passion John took her overpoweringly in his arms, drawing her from the hammock until she rested against him.

"I love you!" he said. "It seems to me there is nothing but for me to tell you of it. I love you!"

For one little moment Mrs. Faulkner lay in his embrace. The next, she was pushing him away from her with tremulous hands that seemed to caress him as they touched.

"The pity of it!" she cried. "You, of all men! You, who love Betty so dearly!"

"I do not love Betty," denied John. "I loved her once, but I do not love her now!"

Even as he spoke the words John Kenadie knew that they were a lie. The knowledge came to him with the words on his lips. He loved Betty. He did not love Mrs. Faulkner. An evil passion had mastered him for a moment, soiling her sweet purity in his eyes. It was his sin. She had no part in it. He had held her fragrant body in his arms. She could not prevent that. Yet all the time he loved Betty, not her.

His own self-contempt made him bitter and reckless.

"The pity of it!" cried Mrs. Faulkner again. "Oh, John Kenadie, how could you — how could you? It has hurt me so! You were so false to yourself! You love Betty! Even if I might permit you to love me, you could not! You can

never love any one but Betty! God made you so! Oh, why were n't you true — why were n't you true?"

It was a strange cry. Mrs. Faulkner was softly sobbing.

John passed his hands across his eyes as if to sweep Betty's image from before them.

"I love you!" he said. "I do not love Betty!"

"For shame!" cried Mrs. Faulkner. "For shame!"

She stood proudly straight, looking him full in the eyes.

"I do not want to despise you!" she spoke. "I believe, somehow, you are innocent of the worst meaning of what you have done. You must help me to believe it. You must go back to Betty at once. She loves you as dearly as you love her. You must go back to Betty. If you do not, I shall despise you!"

"You have a right to despise me," answered John Kenadie. "I am a coward and a scoundrel!"

Suddenly a sense of Mrs. Faulkner's goodness possessed him. It smote him with a cruel shame.

Then he stood silent.

Mrs. Faulkner lifted her head and looked at him.

"No, you are not a coward nor a scoundrel — yet!" she cried. "You would not be standing there, shamed, if you were. You were ignorant.

You did not know. You are nothing but a big country boy. Maybe I led you on without realizing how untrained you were. I will not even blame you. Yet you must go back to Betty!"

The man's face was white with pain. He shook his head.

"I would indeed be a scoundrel if I went back to her!" he said.

Mrs. Faulkner's gray eyes lightened swiftly.

Then, without warning, she went to John Kenadie and laid her little hand, still trembling, upon his arm.

"See!" she said. "How glad I am to forgive you! But only if you go to Betty now and tell her again how dearly you love her!"

Then she left him.

## XXIV

### THE SHADOW DARKENS THE WAY

So sinister was the look on Hugh Latham's face that Betty fell to trembling at sight of it.

"You and John have quarreled!" she cried.

Her eyes were wide with terror.

"You have quarreled with him and something dreadful has been done! I know it!" Betty cried. "I can see it in your eyes, Hugh! You have come with the news of it!"

Hugh made as if to speak. Betty would not hear him.

"Be silent!" she commanded. It was a pathetic little cry. "Give me breathing time, Hugh! You have got to wait! You have been so quick to come to me with your news! You have got to wait!"

The girl's eyes held him dumb.

"I know what it is!" she said at last. "You have killed John."

A sob shook Betty as the words were spoken.

"You have killed John!" she repeated. "That is what you come to tell me. That is why you say I can never marry him now. It is because he is dead. You met him when I sent you away from me. You have killed him!"

"No, Betty, no!" answered Hugh. "I have not killed John!"

Betty's face was hard and incredulous.

"It is not that!" Hugh exclaimed. "I am telling you the truth. I have not killed John Kenadie. We have not even quarreled. I swear that this is the truth. My God! If I had killed him, would I hurry to you with the news?"

The girl was watching him breathlessly.

"Don't you see?" continued Hugh. "I am not even armed!"

As he spoke he struck his pockets and threw back his flapping coat to show Betty that he carried no weapon about him.

It was an instinctive and eloquent act. Betty's hands suddenly ceased their fluttering at her bosom and her eyes lost something of the terror that had been in them. She gazed at Hugh searchingly.

"Then he is not dead?" she asked. "You have not killed him? No harm has come to him?"

Hugh Latham laughed.

"No harm has come to him," he replied grimly.

"Thank God!" cried Betty. "Oh, thank God!"

At sight of her joy Hugh Latham's hatred of John Kenadie grew to a deadlier bitterness.

"I did not kill him," he said. "Yet I ought to have killed him!"

Betty's eyes widened at the significance of Hugh's manner. She looked at him with a sudden steadiness.

"What is it, Hugh?" she asked.

"Betty," answered Hugh, "before I tell you, I want you to promise that you will forgive me for having told you."

"There is no question of forgiveness!" cried Betty quickly. "You have come here to tell me. You intend telling me before you go away. What is it you have to tell me?"

Hugh blushed angrily at the shrewd reply.

"It is for your good that you should know," he muttered, sullen and shamed. "You ought to be thankful when I have told you!"

"What is it?" again asked Betty. "Tell me, and be done with it. Is it about John?"

"Yes, about John," answered Hugh. "It is about him and — and about Mrs. Faulkner!"

Betty's lips parted as though she would cry aloud.

Then, with one little hand lifted to her throat, she spoke again.

"About John and Mrs. Faulkner? What about them?"

Hugh Latham told her what he had seen an hour before.

Betty listened, her frank and pure eyes full on the speaker. As he went on with his story great waves of red rose and fell in the face that was else white with the hurt of the words. Hugh Latham was shamed to his very soul by the thing he was doing. Yet hatred of John Kenadie held down the shame and made it possible for him to finish.

Betty was silent when Hugh ceased speaking.

Hugh studied her for a moment.

"I am sorry, Betty," he said. "Still, it was best for you to know that this thing happened. It shows you how things stand now. It proves to you what John Kenadie is."

Betty made no sign.

"He has forgotten you," spoke Hugh. "He is making love to a married woman."

"You say that you saw all this?" asked Betty. "You saw John put his arms around Mrs. Faulkner? You saw him — you saw him kissing her?"

"Yes, Betty," answered Hugh, "it was just as I have told you. I saw it with my own eyes."

Once more the girl stood silent.

"To tell me this about John Kenadie!" she said, as if speaking to herself. "To tell me this about John Kenadie!"

Then she turned to Hugh, straight, with proud eyes.

"It is not true!" she cried.

Hugh Latham looked at Betty in amazement. She laughed at him.

"It is not true!" she cried again. "I never dreamed you could do so cowardly a thing as this, Hugh!"

"It is true, Betty!" said Hugh. "I swear it!"

After the manner of devout households in the L'Anguille lowlands, the family Bible was among

the few books on the parlor table. Hugh advanced and placed his right hand solemnly on the Book.

"I swear it on the Bible," he said. "It is God's truth."

Betty laughed at him again.

"You might swear it on all the Bibles that were ever printed, Hugh," she made answer; "and then I would not believe you. I cannot believe such a thing of John Kenadie. It is impossible!"

"You must believe it!" cried Hugh fiercely. "It is God's truth, I tell you!"

"I will believe it," replied Betty, "when John Kenadie tells me."

At this Hugh Latham laughed back at her bitterly, lifting one clenched hand and with it smiting the palm of the other.

"John Kenadie is likely to confess such a thing to you, is n't he?" he asked, mockery in his tone. "He is likely to tell you, or to tell any one else, is n't he? Mrs. Faulkner is likely to tell, is n't she? Why, my God, Betty, even I myself would never breathe a word of this thing if it did n't concern you so! Even now I will tell you only, of all the world. Yet, besides those two, John Kenadie and Mrs. Faulkner alone, I am the only one who knows!"

Betty laughed again.

"That's exactly what you 've counted on!" she cried. "You are the only one who can tell, you say. Why? Because it is your tale, and you

have made it up to turn me against John. It is a fine story! You take pains to explain to me that both of them would deny it if I asked them about it! You saw this thing, you say, out there in open daylight, in front of the house! You saw it, nobody else on God's earth but you, and you are the only one that could profit by having seen it! You come to me with this story of John and ask me to believe it! It is not the truth. It is a lie!"

Betty's little head was held high. Her voice rang proudly.

Hugh Latham stood in helpless chagrin before her. He had not dreamed that she would refuse to believe him. It was, indeed, his story, as Betty had said. He had no shred of proof to offer for its upholding. There was no proof possible to him. Betty's stubborn faith in John Kenadie destroyed in a breath the fabric upon which Hugh had builded his last hope of winning her. He stood helpless.

Then a new and recklessly gladdening thought came into Hugh's mind.

"I will face John Kenadie before you," he said to Betty, "and tell him what I have told you. I will prove by him that it is true!"

"No, you will not," answered Betty. "You will never set your foot inside of this house again, Hugh. After this once, and since you have proved how low you are willing to sink to injure John

Kenadie, you cannot come here again. I have the right to say this. I say it to you now and for all time to come. You shall not set foot in this house again!"

"Then," said Hugh, "I will kill John Kenadie as sure as I live!"

Betty's face went deadly white. But her eyes were steady. "John Kenadie knows how to take care of himself," she said. "I am not afraid for him any longer. He knows how to take care of himself."

She looked bravely into Hugh's eyes, praying in her soul that if it came to the worst between the two men, John Kenadie should indeed know how to take care of himself. Then she was silent.

Hugh confronted her, crushing his weather-beaten hat between his fingers.

"Betty," he spoke at last, "I'm going. I'm sorry you won't believe what I've told you. It is God's truth, but if you won't believe it, you won't. Some day you'll be sorry for not believing it."

"When I am," answered Betty, her voice trembling strangely after its steadiness of a moment before, "I promise you I'll tell you so. But I won't be sorry until I have better reason than I have now!"

"I have told you the truth," said Hugh. "Good-by, Betty."

Upon which he went away. And Betty Thorn-

dike, when he was gone, covered her face with her little hands and sank, sobbing and crying as if her heart would break, down to the floor, where she sat rocking her body pitifully to and fro. For she had seen that Hugh Latham was telling her the truth, only she would have died, and for John's sake it seemed to her, rather than let Hugh know.

After a little time Betty rose and stood by the old-fashioned mantelpiece, her spirit broken that had been so proud while Hugh Latham was with her, her arms on the mantel, her face buried in them. As she stood there thus, John Kenadie came and touched her hair with shamed and remorseful fingers, and then leaned down and kissed it, calling her by name.

## **XXV**

### **ALONE — WITHOUT BETTY**

“BETTY,” he said, “I have come to ask your forgiveness.”

He stood with bowed head, his face pale and drawn.

“Do you understand, Betty?” he asked. “I have done a shameful thing. I want you to forgive me.”

The girl lifted her head from her arms and looked at him. Love shone in her eyes even then.

“Betty,” said John, “an hour ago I told Mrs. Faulkner I loved her and did not love you. I thought it was the truth. I thought I had quit loving you. I thought I loved her instead. But it was not true. It was you I loved.”

The solemn words were a confession, not a defense.

Betty’s face was pitiful to see.

“Hugh Latham has just been here,” she interrupted. “He told me all about it, John. How could you do it? Oh, John Kenadie, how could you — how could you?”

A little sob broke Betty’s voice as she spoke.

“You did not hear what I was saying, Betty,”

John continued. "I was telling you of something I have done to-day,—something that I must tell you. And you have not understood what I was trying to tell you. Won't you listen to me, Betty?"

"Hugh has already told me, John," answered Betty. "He was here just a little while ago."

There was a dreadful meaning in the calm speech.

"He saw you with your arms around Mrs. Faulkner," said Betty. "He saw you kissing her. Then he came to tell me, knowing that I thought you loved me instead of her."

There was a heart-breaking silence as Betty paused.

"How could you do it, John?" Betty asked. "She is a married woman, the wife of another man. It is such a sin! It is such a sin!"

Betty was crying softly.

"I do not think of myself at all," she said, "for thinking of you. It was not ever meant that you should do such a thing. You have been so strong and good and clean always. Oh, John, dear, dear John, how has this sin come to you? How could it come to you, of all men?"

Betty broke down again, sobbing.

"I was so proud of you!" she cried. "I was so proud of you!"

John Kenadie's hands were clenched at his side.

"I have no excuse," he said. "It was all my fault. I thought I loved Mrs. Faulkner. Thinking that, I did not care for the sin."

He drew a quick and deep breath.

"My love for you seemed to have gone away from me," explainingly. "When I thought of you I thought of you as caring for Hugh, not for me. Somehow, that seemed to justify me. I was glad when I believed that I loved Mrs. Faulkner."

A swift self-reproach came into Betty's heart at the words.

Then a thought of Mrs. Faulkner's beauty.

"Hugh has told you the truth about me, Betty," said John. "I do not deny what he has told you."

There was a new note in his voice.

"Yet it is left for me to tell you the truth about Mrs. Faulkner," he continued. "You must know the truth about her."

Betty's face grew suddenly hard and cold.

"You must not misjudge Mrs. Faulkner," said John. "She is a good woman. Not in any way is she to blame for what I have done."

The shame in his face became even greater.

"She sent me away from her," John told Betty. "She would not listen to me. She sent me away from her."

"She was quiet in your arms when Hugh saw her," answered Betty. "Her hands were on your shoulders. And she was letting you kiss her."

John's face flushed and then turned pale.

"She did not know what she was doing," he said. "I frightened her. She was helpless for

.

the moment. Then she made me release her. She is a good woman. She sent me away from her."

"She loves you!" cried Betty, "and she is another man's wife. She let you kiss her!"

"Betty," said John earnestly, "I have told you the truth about myself. You must believe what I tell you about Mrs. Faulkner. She did not encourage me in any way. She sent me from her."

"If she had not loved you and wanted you to love her," answered Betty, "she would not have let you kiss her and hold her in your arms!"

"If she had loved me," asked John Kenadie, "would she have sent me back to you?"

Betty started as if John had struck her a blow.

"She told me to come back to you," said John. "It was the last thing before she left me, Betty. She sent me back to you!"

"She sent you back to me?" repeated Betty.

"I would not have come back otherwise," answered John. "You are misjudging her cruelly, Betty. She said she would not forgive me for what I had done if I did not come back to you!"

A great flood of shamed red rushed into Betty Thorndike's face. She looked at John long and curiously. Then she laughed.

"Now I begin to understand, John," she said, a little break in her voice. "It did seem strange that you should have come so quickly from her to me. I thought it was because you loved me and were sorry. It was as if you had forgotten me

for a little while and were ashamed and sorry that you had forgotten me. But it was because Mrs. Faulkner sent you back to me. It was she who thought of me, not you!"

John's punishment was a cruel punishment. Never had he so yearningly loved Betty as now. Yet she would not understand.

"Betty," he said helplessly, "I do not know what to say to you. I love you dearly. I would have come to you just the same, I see it now, even if Mrs. Faulkner had not told me to come. I would have come to you again, some time, even if she had been willing that I should leave you for her. But it does not look that way to you, and I see why it does not. It is all my fault. I cannot say anything to convince you, Betty, and yet—I love you! I love you! I love you!"

"No, John," spoke Betty sadly, "you are sorry for me only. You do not love me. It is a pity that comes to you because for so many years you had loved me, or thought you loved me, only to find out that you did not. Mrs. Faulkner sent you back to me because she would not let herself love you—this I will believe to her credit—and she wants you to try and be happy without her. You are both sorry for me. I see it plainly, John—oh, so plainly!"

"I have loved you all my life, Betty," John humbly said.

At this a little sob came from Betty's throat

and she turned half away from him, her arm suddenly thrown across her eyes.

"I always thought so!" she said brokenly.  
"Oh, I always thought so, until now!"

"Betty, you cannot mean it, you cannot mean it!" cried John. "There ought to be something in your own soul that tells you I am speaking the truth. I can only say the words. But you ought to know that they are true. And you won't believe me! You won't believe me!"

Betty did not look at him.

"I would give anything in the world," she sobbed, "if I could believe you! I will love you all my life, John. It hurts me a thousand times more than it hurts you that we cannot be as we were in the old times. I always thought that if any trouble ever came to us it would be my fault. I was so feather-headed and changeable in my ways. Yet I could always come back to you and find you steady and constant and ready to forgive me. And now, and now—oh, John Kenadie, I think my heart will break with it all!"

John caught Betty in his arms.

"Dear God!" he said in his soul, "this is my prayer to you! Help me to show Betty Thorndike that I love her. All my life I will not ask you anything so great as this again. I love her. Help me to prove it!"

Then Betty released herself and moved a step away.

It was not done as if she feared him or resented his embrace. It came to John himself that she did not resent it, because she meant it to be a farewell. It was so like Betty. She might still love him, but he was unworthy of her and she would put him out of her life. It was his punishment.

He stood before her with bowed head.

As he thus stood, a sudden fear sprang into Betty's eyes. It came from the swift recalling of Hugh Latham's deadly threat when she had laughed at his story of John's faithlessness. It struck her white with dread.

"John!" she cried, "you must watch Hugh! He means to kill you!"

Betty saw that John Kenadie did not understand. He did not even seem to care. He was looking fixedly at her. He was still sorry for her, she thought. It was in his eyes, the pity of it all. Dear, honest John, who would have kept on loving her if he could!

"You must understand!" she cried fiercely. "Listen to me, John! Hugh Latham is very bitter against you. I would not let him see that I believed what he told me. I laughed at him. It made him mad. Not at me, but at you, John. He said he would kill you. Oh, John, be careful! He will surely try to kill you — it is in his heart to do it! For God's sake, John, do not let Hugh kill you!"

The fear possessing her sounded in Betty's voice.

John Kenadie lifted his hands as if to soothe her. There was a sad little smile on his lips as he let his arms fall again by his side. Then, for the comforting of Betty, he was unjust to Hugh.

"If Hugh told you that, Betty," he said quietly, "there is no danger of his trying to kill me. He only wanted to frighten you. He will take it out in talk. A man does not go around telling a thing like that when he is in earnest. It is not the way of men. You'll see that I'm right, Betty. Hugh won't try to kill me!"

"God grant it!" cried Betty.

She was greatly reassured by John's words and manner. She remembered now hearing her father say very much the same in discussing some sudden L'Anguille tragedy of personal combat. Such things came without warning. It was men's way.

There was a little hush of silence after this. John felt that Betty was about to leave him. He stretched out his hands to her.

"Betty," he said humbly, "won't you let us be as we used to be? I love you. I have never loved anybody but you. Can't you believe me, Betty?"

Again a sob came into Betty's throat and shook her pitifully.

"I will love you always, John," she answered. "I will love you to my dying day, I think. But this is our parting. It is good-by between us now. We cannot go back—we cannot—oh, John, we cannot!"

Then she was gone and John was alone — without Betty.

It was Hugh Latham's fault.

This thought kept beating itself into John's brain as he galloped madly through the woods in the falling darkness. Hugh had come between him and Betty. Betty had cast him off because of Hugh. She would marry Hugh yet. That would be the end of it all.

John Kenadie lifted his clenched fist and shook it in the air.

“I gave him a fair warning!” he muttered. “I told him I'd kill him if he took Betty from me. He knows what to expect!”

## **XXVI**

### **THE QUARREL IN THE WOODS**

ON the following morning, which was Sunday, John Kenadie went with Miss Sugarlump to church. The famous "hard-shell Baptist" exhorter, Hardy Wilson, had arrived at L'Anguille on his evangelizing circuit, and it was a great occasion.

John's early thoughts had been sombre; but when little Mrs. Kenadie called to him that it was church time he went to her with a tranquil countenance,—an earnest, good-looking young countryman in his black Sunday clothes and snowy linen, his dark soft hat swinging in his hand. He put his arm around Miss Sugarlump's shoulder and kissed her.

"For goodness' sake!" she cried. "That's one of your old-time kisses, Sonnie, when you were a little boy and thought more of me than you do now!"

"There never was such a time!" said John. "I love you now better than I ever did!"

Miss Sugarlump laughed mockingly at her son.

"That's what you tell me!" she retorted. "Yet every minute of the day and night you are

thinking of Betty! How can you love me more now, when you're just wrapped up in her?"

"I do, though," answered John, paling a little.  
"And I'll prove it to you!"

Saying which he took his mother in his arms and gave her a good hug. It would have appalled Miss Sugarlump's soul if she could have known the black shadow under which John stood even then. But she did not know.

"Well, Sonnie!" she laughed, "if being in love has that effect on you, I ought to feel safe about the future! You won't forget me at any rate!"

John made no reply.

They had moved out to where Uncle Shadrach was waiting for them with their Sunday equipage of state, the ancient family rockaway. The old negro had been putting himself in a properly devout frame of mind by a most soulful chanting of "Come, humble sinner, in whose breast," while he rubbed as bright a polish into the worn harness as it would take. He chuckled as he heard Miss Sugarlump's words.

"Dat's des de way wid a young man when he in love, Miss Sugarlump," old Shadrach ventured. "Dey des love ev'ything in sight,—dis whole wide worl' an' all. An' dey 'll set demselves down an' make sof' eyes at de moon an' de stars ef yo' doan' watch 'em!"

Miss Sugarlump laughed at this picture of love's effect.

"Was it that way with you, Uncle Shadrach," she asked, "when you fell in love with Aunt Marg'ret?"

The old negro's face dropped a bit at this.

"Hit was 'bleedged to be, Miss Sugarlump!" he replied, a smile then wrinkling his humorous lips. "Ol' Shadrach des needed all de love he could lay he hands on fo' to fotch him th'oo dis yere life wid dat ol' Marg'ret. She de mos' tryin' 'oman de good Lord ever made, dass de trufe. An' He done made some mighty tryin' ones, too!"

Then, with Miss Sugarlump and John comfortably placed in the rockaway, old Shadrach took the driver's seat, clucked to his horse, and the journey churchward was begun.

On so important an occasion as a pastoral visit from the potential Hardy Wilson it was hopeless to expect that the little schoolhouse in the woods, which was the neighborhood place of intermittent worship, would accommodate the men of the L'An-guille lowlands. John accordingly, upon their arrival, saw his mother safely seated within, and then withdrew to the society of his masculine fellows under the trees where he had played as a boy.

But he did not remain long among them.

"I just saw Miss Betty Thorndike go in with her ma, John Kenadie," said Ben Yarbrough significantly as John came up. "She was lookin' as pretty and spirited as a thoroughbred filly, too!"

"That's easy for Miss Betty," replied John as

indifferently as was possible to him. "God made it easy for her to look pretty, Ben!"

"Geminy Christmas!" ejaculated Ben, turning with a laugh to those about him. "Did n't he say that just as solemn as a preacher, boys? Why, John, you're as pious-like as old Parson Wilson himself!"

A good-natured laugh went up from the group.

"John's been putting on his church manners for Miss Betty," suggested Tom Prewitt with a wise air. "He's going to escort her home, I'll bet, and he wants to have his Sunday ways all set on him in time!"

There was another laugh at this sally.

Then John moved away under the sober dominance of his own thought. He felt that he could not endure the memories of Betty's and his sweet-hearting brought up by this friendly badinage. Also, he was afraid of his own temper to-day.

He was in deep reverie as he went a little distance into the solitude of the woods; for he knew it was but a matter of a brief time when he and Hugh Latham would meet.

And on any day but this the meeting must be a deadly one.

The customs prevailing in John's little L'An-guille world tended to rob his impending encounter with Hugh of much of the horror which it would have possessed in a different society. While he had never as yet found himself occupying the

position of a principal in what his community called "a shooting scrape," he had known of several such affairs in the town, had witnessed one or two, accepting them always as natural settlements of serious personal differences between men, and had no conviction of their wrongfulness. It was the way of his world.

Nevertheless, though the animal side of him rejoiced at the prospect of combat with Hugh because of Betty, it was not reasonable that John Kenadie should fail to appreciate the gravity of the present crisis in his life. It came into his mind with especial force this Sunday morning, after his little talk with his mother and his glimpse into the holy calm of the schoolhouse church. The sound of Miss Sugarlump's gentle voice was still in his ears as he paused, musing, in the dreamful woods. The homely congregation assembled for Sabbath worship was singing one of the sweet countryside hymns, — "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand," — and the melody reached him, softened and harmonized, as from the pipes of a great sylvan organ. It seemed to fitly voice the spirit of religious peace conveyed to his soul by the hushed trees themselves.

For the moment the deadly rage against Hugh Latham which had been in John's heart since Betty cast him off died away. Its passing was followed by a reaction infinitely depressing. His gentler self, the poet side of his nature, prevailed to in-

crease his sadness. He felt the guilt of being out of harmony with this beautiful and holy day. To his own view he became like some evil thing in a setting of reproachful purity and peace. For a time he stood in unhappy thought, his dark face intent with brooding. Then, with a faint sigh, he turned to retrace his steps.

As he turned he saw Hugh Latham coming towards him.

A hot anger instantly possessed him.

He was certain that Hugh had sought him out in this solitude. It was his first sight of Hugh since his loss of Betty. The man was bold indeed to face him after having been a talebearer for his undoing. John felt a throb of fierce delight that things were shaping themselves so. He advanced to meet his enemy. As he did so he threw his clenched hand upward in a gesture singularly imperious and hostile.

"You're the very man I wanted to see, Hugh Latham!" he cried. "I have something to say to you!"

"I have come to give you the chance!" replied Hugh.

For a moment they eyed each other.

"I have come to give you the chance!" Hugh repeated. "Say your say, and be quick about it. I may want a word with you as well!"

"Neither of us wants many words," said John Kenadie. "My say is this: the time has come

when you and I must have a settlement. I mean to kill you, Hugh Latham, or you 'll have to kill me. There 's no other way out of our quarrel. And you know why, Hugh Latham, you know it well ! "

John's face was hard and set with passion.

" You sneaking hound ! " he cried, not waiting for Hugh to speak. " You have told Betty a lie about Mrs. Faulkner and me. Because Mrs. Faulkner is a good woman ; there was no wrong of hers in what you saw yesterday. Yet you have made it appear to Betty as if there was. You rushed to her with your tale, determined to ruin me with her. You 've been making love to her on the sly, you sneak, and you wanted to put me out of your way. You 'll not go to Betty again with your lies about me, Hugh Latham. You 've got to answer to me, face to face, or I 'll shoot you in the back as you run ! "

Hugh drew a deep breath.

" I 'm not armed," he said. " You 've got the advantage of me. Go ahead with your shooting, John Kenadie ! "

As he spoke he watched, alert to spring if John moved.

John Kenadie laughed.

" I mean to give you a chance for your life," he answered. " I warn you now to arm yourself and to stay armed. I 'll shoot you on sight after this day. It 's a fair warning ! "

" I accept it ! " cried Hugh Latham.

Then he smiled with a sneer on his lips.

"You say there was nothing wrong between you and Mrs. Faulkner," he continued. "Yet you were hugging and kissing her when I saw you. And she's a married woman. You'd make love to her and then you'd go and make love to Betty. You sneaking scoundrel! You don't need to tell me that you'll shoot on sight! I'll make you shoot on sight, if there's any shoot in you!"

John's hands hung, clenched at his sides.

"Hugh Latham," he said quietly, "I mean that you shall know the truth about Mrs. Faulkner. I tell you that she would not listen to me when I tried to make love to her. I tell you that she went away from me. I tell you that she is as pure a woman as ever breathed the breath of life. Do you hear what I tell you?"

"Yes, I hear it!" answered Hugh Latham. "Yet I tell you that I saw her in your arms, letting you kiss her as no man but her husband has a right to kiss her. I believe what I see. I saw enough to prove to me just what you are, and just what she is. You lover of married women! Do you think I'd let little Betty Thorndike marry you, not knowing what you are? Do you think I'd let little Betty Thorndike keep on thinking Mrs. Faulkner her friend? And you and Mrs. Faulkner meeting on the sly and hugging and kissing one another? By the Lord! I'd deserve to be shot if I did!"

John struck Hugh Latham a powerful blow in the face, sending him crashing to the ground.

The next moment Hugh had arisen. He sprang at his assailant with a mad curse on his lips. For a flash of time the two men grappled. Then John Kenadie, his dark face distorted with passion, had closed his iron fingers on Hugh's throat. He shook him to and fro as if he meant to shake the life out of him. But suddenly he bore him down to his knees and then, lifting him again, he hurled Hugh from him, sending him to earth with an almost incredible force.

"I'll kill you with my hands!" he called to him. "Stand up and come back at me, you coward! I'll kill you with my bare hands!"

Hugh Latham rose, white and gasping for breath.

He shook his fist impotently at John Kenadie, quivering with hate.

"You hound!" he cried. "You're stronger 'n me, and we can't settle this with our fists! I won't touch you again, you hound! But so sure as there's a God in heaven, I'll kill you the next time we meet. And if you're slow in coming, I'll find you and shoot you down like a dog!"

"You won't have to look for me!" answered John. "Go now, Hugh Latham, or I'll kill you where you stand! It's a fair warning—go, I say! I won't be responsible if you don't—there's murder in my heart!"

The next instant John Kenadie stood alone in the quiet woods, his face livid with a deadly rage, his fists opening and shutting and opening again as if working at a man's throat. From the little schoolhouse church there came the deep and reverent tones of Hardy Wilson's voice invoking God's benediction on the L'Anguille folk.

John Kenadie fell on his knees.

"My God ! My God !" he cried. "What strange thing have you put in my soul that I so hate Hugh Latham one minute and so pity him the next? What is it, God, that I am helpless to overcome ?"

Hamp Crenshaw answered the question.

## XXVII

### UNTO THE FOURTH GENERATION

"It's your father's blood callin' for venge'nce," he said. "You'd ought to ha' killed Hugh Latham long ago, spite'n the fact o' him bein' close kin o' your'n."

The Kentuckian was an ominous figure to look upon. He was in the first stage of what he himself called "a per'odical jamboree." It was his curse, a lust for drink that sent him on mad sprees many times a year. Because of it, he was an outcast and a wanderer.

His eyes were bloodshot from liquor, but they laughed recklessly into John Kenadie's. There was a curious halting in his speech.

"Things are comin' the way — the way I know'd they was bound to come," he said ; "and the way the Good Book says they'd ought to come, too. 'Blood for blood,' the Good Book says, John ; 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth !'"

"In God's name, Hamp," cried John Kenadie, "what do you mean ?"

The rustic congregation was leaving the little schoolhouse church. The two men in the woods were hidden from view and away from any road.

They stood facing each other, the one drunken and fiercely jubilant, the other sober and appalled.

"My father's blood?" repeated John Kenadie, his voice a whisper of awed expectation; "what has that to do with Hugh Latham?"

"It's on his head, that's what—that's what it has to do with him," answered Hamp Crenshaw solemnly, the reckless laughter dying out of the inflamed eyes. "And the fo'th generation of a blood-feud was a-quoinlin' here when you and Hugh Latham was a-quoinlin' here a little minnit ago."

"You know us both," said John Kenadie. "There's something back there in Kentucky to account for all this. That's what you are talking about now, ain't it, Hamp? What is it between Hugh and me?"

"It's hate," replied Hamp Crenshaw, passing his hand across his lips; "hate and killin' and killin' and hate from father to son in ever' Kenadie and Latham's life since ary a Kenadie or a Latham was known in Kentucky. And it's done come down to you now."

Suddenly he shifted his position unsteadily and spoke in warning.

"There's Miss Sugarlump—Miss Sugarlump a-comin' right this way," he said. "She's lookin' for you, John. Don't let her git to us—I would n't have her see me in this fix—in this fix for a pretty!"

The dare-devil mountaineer was as panic-stricken as a boy.

John stepped out to meet Miss Sugarlump.

"Mother," he spoke, "I won't ride home with you. I want to walk. I'll be home directly after you get there. You don't care, do you?"

"No, of course not, Sonnie," instantly replied Miss Sugarlump. Her eyes were shining with tears and her voice was very soft. The Rev. Hardy Wilson had been preaching to L'Anguille souls in deep earnest. "I wish you could have heard the sermon, Sonnie!" Miss Sugarlump added.

John's heart reproached him keenly.

"I wish I could, mother," he answered. "But you can tell me all about it at dinner, you know!"

Then Miss Sugarlump went home alone.

"God be good to her!" said Hamp Crenshaw, shame in his red eyes. "There's the one what knows—the one what knows the blood debt you stand under, John Kenadie!"

"I must know it as well!" John Kenadie cried suddenly. "What is this thing, Hamp Crenshaw, that my mother knows and I don't?"

"She seen your pappy shot down afore her eyes," said Hamp Crenshaw, tossing the iron-gray hair back from his brow with an angry shake of his head. "And he died just as she knelt—just as she knelt down side of him and called to him by his name. And it was Hugh Latham's pappy, her brother, that killed him—Hugh Latham's pappy was Miss Sugarlump's own brother. And he was a coward; the only coward of the stock on ary side!"

John Kenadie never moved. His eyes narrowed on Crenshaw.

The Kentuckian drew a flask from his pocket and took a long draught from it. He made no proffer of the liquor to John Kenadie. Then he wiped his twitching lips and spat on the earth.

"They all fought fair 'cep'n him," he said. "He come in the night and called your pappy to the door. Miss Sugarlump — Miss Sugarlump had been a-dreadin' somethin' of the sort. She stood in the door with your pappy, the light a-shinin' behind 'em. And Hugh Latham's father killed him that — that way. It was murder."

"Poor little mother!" whispered John Kenadie.  
"Poor little mother!"

"Miss Sugarlump had run away with your pappy and married him," said Hamp Crenshaw. "Their men folks had been a-killin' of each other for three generations, but them two loved one another and your pappy persuaded Miss Sugarlump to run away with him. And when she come back to her brother — when Miss Sugarlump come back, beggin' him to be reconciled, he th'ew her off. He swore then and thar that he'd make her a Kenadie's widow afore the year was gone. And he did — he did. He made Miss Sugarlump a widow, and he broke her heart, and he ruined her sweet and happy life for all time to come."

The quaint feather touches of gray in Miss Sugarlump's brown hair — John remembered see-

ing them there when he was a little boy. He knew now what they meant.

Hamp Crenshaw laid one clenched fist against the tree trunk at his side.

"Miss Sugarlump loved your pappy, John," he said, "better 'n I ever know'd ary other man to be loved by a woman in this here world. She was a-kneelin' down by his side when he give one cry to her and then died. You wa'n't born then, John, and Hugh Latham, this Hugh what's here in L'Anguille, was only a baby. When your pappy — when your pappy died that way, poor little Miss Sugarlump lifted her hands and prayed above his body. She prayed that when you come you might be a man-child and that you might live to take venge'nce on her brother's son for the murder of your pappy."

Hamp Crenshaw's grim face was moved with pity.

"There ain't a tenderer-hearted woman than Miss Sugarlump on God's green footstool!" he cried. "It is her nature to love every created thing!"

Sonnie Kenadie bowed his head in mute acquiescence.

"But she was tried more 'n her nature could stand!" exclaimed Crenshaw. "And she was a'most out of her head with sorrow and lonesomeness after your pappy died. Even after you was born, and Miss Sugarlump told me this herself when I was here afore, she used to kneel down by

you at night and pray that same prayer again — that God would make you take venge'nce on her brother's son. And afore you was born, she prayed always that you, the baby in her womb, should be filled with her hatred and so made ready for the thing she wanted you to do. It was in her thoughts by day and in her prayers by night."

A light of dreadful understanding came into John's eyes.

Then he called to Crenshaw, strangely.

"But why," he cried, "why has my mother always wanted me to love this Hugh Latham here in L'Anguille, not hate him?"

Hamp Crenshaw's fierce face softened in its lines.

"Because Miss Sugarlump repented of her prayer," he replied, "and has been dreadin' ever since that it would be answered the way she asked for. She has a feelin' — a feelin' that you drawed in her hatred with the very blood that she give you from her own body. Miss Sugarlump thinks that her prayer put a curse on you. And she loved her brother when they was a-growin' up together. She loved him again in her mem'ry when she knew he had gone to his last accountin'. And her love come down to Hugh, her brother's son. He is the only son of her only brother. Miss Sugarlump loves him and knows — and knows that you hate him."

"If I hate Hugh," said John, "it is because it

would have been born in me to hate him anyhow. You have just said that the Kenadies and the Lathams have had hate between them for three generations."

"For four generations now," corrected Hamp Crenshaw. "You and this here Hugh Latham are the fo'th generation. But Miss Sugarlump believes that because you and Hugh are blood kin, bein' the sons of a brother and sister, the hate would ha' died out in you 'cep'n' for her hate of her brother just afore you was born. She calls it — she calls it per — per-natal influence ; an unborn child takin' the thoughts of his mother when he lays in her womb. She's done told me that doctors believe in it. And she says if you and Hugh ever has any ser'ous trouble, it 'll be 'cause of the curse she placed on you."

"And you, Hamp Crenshaw," asked John, a sinister quiet in his voice, "what would you think of it?"

The mountaineer looked at John curiously, his jaw set hard.

"I know'd Miss Sugarlump afore she was married," he said in a low voice ; "no happier nor sunnier-hearted girl never lived than her. I know'd her when she was your pappy's wife. It was like lookin' into heaven to look into her eyes then. I seen her face the day her husband was buried. It ain't poor little Miss Sugarlump's short-lived bitterness that put the hate of this here Hugh Latham

in your soul, John Kenadie. The Lord God A'mighty put it thar for her sake. He done it, not Miss Sugarlump, and His Word tells you He made a law for sech cases. ‘Blood for blood,’ the Lord God A'mighty says ; ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth !’ ”

“Hamp,” said John Kenadie, “I want you to listen to something I have to say now.”

“I’m a-listenin’,” answered Hamp Crenshaw. “I want to hear whatever you’ve got to say.”

And then John Kenadie told him how things stood with Hugh Latham, Betty Thorndike, and himself.

“It was bound to come that way,” said Hamp Crenshaw when the recital was ended. “What’s goin’ to be will be. Fate, they call it. You and this here Hugh Latham might ha’ been parted by the width o’ this big yearth, and yet you’d ha’ come together at the app’nted time. Your dead pappy’s blood would ha’ drawn both of you to a meetin’ place : you, to git payment for that blood ; this here Hugh Latham, to make the payment. There’s some things like this that men kain’t git away from. Miss Sugarlump brought you here from Kentucky that you might escape. But you kain’t escape — you kain’t git away — it’s stronger’n you — it’s stronger’n Miss Sugarlump — you’ve got to face it !”

“I believe you !” said John solemnly. “It is the truth.”

A moment of silence intervened.

"Hamp," said John at last, "I want to ask you not to see my mother. I want to ask you not to say one word about Hugh and me to any soul in L'Anguille. You're drinking, but I can trust your word of honor, drunk or sober. Give it to me. I'll attend to all the rest. Give me your word, Hamp."

"You've got it, John," replied the grim mountaineer. "I'm off to-night, anyway. I only drifted back here to L'Anguille last night, and I came out to this here revival meetin' with a bottle of whiskey in my pocket just out of fool sinfulness, I reckon. I'll finish up my jamboree somewhere else. I kain't stay in one place when I'm drinkin', anyhow. And I ain't told you nothin' but God's truth, John Kenadie. You've got to kill Hugh Latham."

"I am going to kill him," replied John; "or he'll kill me, one or the other. That's the only thing that'll keep me from killing him."

## XXVIII

### A PAYMENT IN BLOOD

JOHN KENADIE rode into the village square of L'Anguille when the lazy hush of late afternoon had fallen on the little Arkansas town.

Earlier in the day, from the far end of the field in which he was at work, himself unseen, he had seen Hugh Latham go by on his way into L'Anguille. He followed him.

Dismounting, he threw his bridle rein over the hitching-post in front of Sim Perkins's store. He shook his coat straight and then felt to see that the pistol on whose butt it had caught hung conveniently to the quick touch of his right hand.

"Sim," he asked, "where will I find Hugh Latham?"

"You'll find him in Billy Greenleaf's bar-room," answered Sim Perkins. "I just seen him go in there with Buck Barbee to get a drink."

The place indicated was directly opposite, across the square.

Sim Perkins looked at John curiously.

"And he was asking if you had come in town, too," he added. "He asked me, as soon as he got here, if I'd seen you."

John Kenadie nodded.

"We were counting on running across each other," he said.

Then he saw Hugh pass out of Billy Greenleaf's bar-room and take a sweeping survey of the square as he gained the open. Buck Barbee, wiping his lips with the back of his hand, emerged behind him.

John started to cross the distance intervening between them. Hugh came to meet him.

Sim Perkins moved so that he stood partly behind one of the heavy posts supporting the little porch in front of the store. At the same instant Buck Barbee left Hugh's side. The two men advancing on one another halted almost simultaneously. Hugh drew his pistol.

But John Kenadie lifted his left hand in restraint.

"Stop as you are!" he cried. "I have something to tell you!"

Suspicion mingled with amazement in Hugh's face.

"We've had enough words!" he answered angrily. "This is a strange time you've chosen for more talk!"

"It's a strange thing that makes me choose it," said John Kenadie. "But it's something you've got to hear!"

Hugh Latham laughed.

"Will you give me your word," he asked, "that you're not going to beg off from the fight?"

"God knows I will!" said John Kenadie solemnly. "I give you my word that I'll kill you when I'm done."

Hugh Latham's taunt had sounded good in his ears. John's upper lip lifted in the fighting smile which was a part of his Kenadie inheritance.

"I want you to know how just it is in God's sight," he told Hugh, "if you are to die by my hand."

"Out with it!" cried Hugh impatiently. "Get your sermon off your mind and fight, if there's any fight in you!"

In a breath almost, John Kenadie told Hugh Latham of the blood-feud and the kinship that lived between them.

Hugh laughed as he heard it.

"And so my father killed your father?" he asked, a reckless sneer in his blue eyes as they studied John Kenadie's face.

John bent his head. He was white to the lips.

"And he was Miss Sugarlump's brother?" asked Hugh. "Her own, only, dearly beloved brother?"

Hugh's tone was in itself an insult.

"Then I'm her nephew, ain't I?" he continued, "and you and me are first cousins, ain't we? Is that it, John Kenadie?"

The man to whom he spoke was smiling now. His eyes held Hugh's eyes with a glad fierceness.

"And you all are the closest kin I've got in the world?" inquired Hugh. "Why, I'm almost like one of the family, then, ain't I?"

And John nodded, smiling.

Hugh laughed.

"Well!" he said then. "I must confess, John Kenadie, that there's one part of your story sounds mighty true to me!"

He was still laughing.

"I can easy believe," he said, "that your blood and mine has been hating each other since God knows when. I can feel that in my bones."

Then he moved a step forward.

"But the rest of the story knocks it out," he laughed. "Would you like to know what I think of this tale of you and me being close blood-kin, John Kenadie?"

John Kenadie made no reply. He was watching Hugh Latham.

"I think it's a cold-blooded lie!" cried Hugh. "You've made it up because you believed I'd refuse to fight when I heard it. You hoped I'd think of Miss Sugarlump, my aunt, as you tell me, and so I would n't kill her dear son John! You coward, you!"

He raised his pistol and fired.

Not even then did the smile leave John Kenadie's lips or the glad fierceness die out of his eyes. His soft hat, pierced through its upturned brim and dented body by Hugh's bullet, was lifted from his

head and hurled away from him. He threw down his pistol to the straight-arm level that was his trick of shooting and fired at Hugh Latham's breast.

"Take that!" he whispered. "And tell your father in hell that you've paid his debt for him!"

The quick quiver of Hugh's body announced to John Kenadie that his bullet had struck its mark. He noted the sudden whitening of Hugh's face and a spasmotic clutch at the bosom of his cotton shirt by the fingers of the left hand. It was a good shot, he thought.

But Hugh did not fall. He stood for just a breath of time, rigid and straight, gasping from the shock of his wound.

Then, with a queer and sickening little smile on his lips, he made another step forward and fired at John the second time, missing him again.

"God forever damn you!" he cursed, a great anguish of apprehension in his voice. "You've kept sober, you trick-shot coward, just for this!"

And then John Kenadie understood the wildness of Hugh's two shots. The fool had gone to drinking. Of all men, at this time of all times! The fool! The fool!

But it was life or death at close quarters now.

Even so, Hugh was again the first to fire. Another step forward he took, this time uncertainly, firing once more as he came. John Kenadie felt a burning sting fasten itself along the flesh of his thigh.

Then he saw Hugh level his pistol across his uplifted left arm. It was a steadyng rest and of deadly menace.

Quick as thought John threw down his pistol from his shoulder again, pulling the trigger as its muzzle uncovered Hugh's face in the line of fire. He was none too quick. Two reports rang out in succession, that from John's weapon the first by a fraction of time.

It was John Kenadie's second shot and Hugh Latham's fourth. The latter was a shot in the air.

And John saw Hugh whirl dreadfully around on tiptoed feet, confronting him again with a drawn and awful face, then fall forward to the ground like a butchered beast, his arms stretched out in front of him, the opened, grasping fingers of his right hand resting on his pistol where it lay in the dust.

A pitiful cry sounded from Hugh's lips as he fell.

"John!" he cried, choking, "John! Don't shoot me again!"

Then he was silent.

For the moment John Kenadie had but one thought. The fight was ended. His enemy was killed. And he was alive. The fight was ended.

It was a triumphing thought.

He stood steadfast in his tracks, pistol in hand.

Suddenly a great horror of his blood-guiltiness fell upon him.

The voice that had entreated him was a boy's voice.

And the agonized face that had been turned to him as Hugh lurched forward to the ground was not the face of a grown man. It was the face of the boy Hugh Latham with whom he had gone to school. He remembered it as a laughing, mischievous face, yet this was strangely and dreadfully the same face. Hugh's hat had fallen off and his yellow and sunburned hair showed uncovered between his outstretched arms where he lay. It had not darkened one whit since he was a little chap at old Gilbert Rolfe's school. John remembered hearing Miss Sugarlump say once that she thought Hugh Latham had such pretty hair for a boy.

Miss Sugarlump had loved Hugh. Good God! He was her brother's son!

And, save for Miss Sugarlump, he was John's nearest kin in all the world. Her blood, too, was in him. John knew, now, why he had thought of her when he saw Hugh's drowning face in the L'Anguille, and why he thought of her in this instant.

"God forgive me!" he whispered, motionless.  
"God forgive me!"

And he himself had been so cool and bent on killing.

His whole soul had been centred on the thought that he must kill Hugh. He had kept himself well in hand, grimly determined that the other should

die. He had exulted at the advantage which came to him because of his superior steadiness. Hugh was unnerved by drink. But he, John, was sober, resolute, deadly. He had taken no chances. His refraining from exchanging shot for shot, was it not the mock generosity born of a certain assurance of victory? The moment Hugh tried to get that dangerous sight across the left arm John had killed him.

It was murder.

Say what he might, it was murder. Hugh's blood was on his head.

With a cry of loathing horror John Kenadie threw his pistol from him. He took a pitiful step towards the body lying face downward in the dust. There might still be life in Hugh. He might yet be saved. God willing, he might yet be saved.

"Hugh!" John cried, not knowing that he spoke. "Hugh!"

And Hugh made answer to the cry.

At that instant he stirred, groaned, and then lifted his bloody face from the earth. Seeing John Kenadie advance upon him, he felt the pistol under his hand at the same time. Heavily he supported his body on the elbow of his left arm.

Thus fronting his enemy he raised his pistol from the dust and fired at close range, upward, shooting John Kenadie through and through, from breast to back. Then his head dropped in the dust again.

John Kenadie fell heavily, choking with the blood that came into his throat and broke from his lips in a flood of red, his empty right hand touching that of Hugh, a little rift of smoke from Hugh's pistol eddying above the two hands.

So the cousins lay when old Gilbert Rolfe reached them.

And because the schoolmaster held in his hand the little parcel just taken from the L'Anguille post-office, and was quick to open John's shirt and reveal the frightful wound in his body, the publishers' proofs of John Kenadie's poems were stained deep with John Kenadie's blood. The old teacher had been rejoicing over them when he heard the first shot fired in the village square.

"How is it, Henley?" he asked of the lowland-bred L'Anguille physician a little time later. "Will he live?"

There was a reluctant shake of the head.

"I hardly think so," came the reply. "It's a slim chance."

Gilbert Rolfe's grim face stiffened and grew older.

"And Hugh Latham?" he asked. "Is there any chance for him?"

Doctor Henley nodded.

"He'll get well," he said. "He was stunned by a slanting shot on the skull, and the body wound's not serious."

Gilbert Rolfe's teeth came hard together.

"John, here," he asked savagely, "can he be taken home?"

The physician bent his head.

"If they drive at an easy walk," he answered. "There's a spring-wagon out there. Take that and this mattress from my bed that he's now lying on, and we'll get him home. If it's not done now, I'm afraid he won't go home alive."

Upon which old Gilbert Rolfe went home with John Kenadie.

And that night he heard little Miss Sugarlump praying aloud where she knelt beside her son's bed.

"Dear Lord," little Miss Sugarlump prayed, "I have loved you all my days. Spare my son to me. Please, Lord, save Sonnie and lift from him the curse that I, his mother, placed on him. Save Sonnie, dear Lord, save Sonnie — save Sonnie!"

## XXIX

### THE NEWS AT THE GATE

ABOUT the same hour that John Kenadie and Hugh Latham met on the village square in L'Anguille Mrs. Faulkner called to see Betty Thordike.

"I've come to say good-by, Betty," she said, when they had gained the shade of the gallery. "I'm going away Wednesday."

Betty could not bring herself to voice a polite regret.

"I did not know you intended leaving so soon, Mrs. Faulkner," she replied, silently resenting the other's presence. "Is n't it rather sudden?"

"Yes, Betty," lightly answered Mrs. Faulkner. "It is a bit sudden, my going. But I came to L'Anguille only on business. There's nothing to keep me any longer. And I have a husband and a home in New Orleans, you know, so it's good for me to return to them."

Betty found herself wondering whether Mrs. Faulkner would have sent John back to her if there had been no Mr. Faulkner, no "husband in New Orleans." It was a sad little thought.

"Yet my visit has been unexpectedly pleasant,"

continued Mrs. Faulkner, smiling. "I'm not trying to flatter you, Betty, although I'd like you to know the delight I have found in meeting you. But you understand what I mean—I have especially enjoyed meeting John Kenadie. He is most interesting, and I am sure you will all be very proud of him before long."

Betty made no reply.

"It was such a surprise to me," said Mrs. Faulkner, "to discover that he was the John Kenadie whose poems I had read and liked so much. And he was himself so distinctly the countryside poet one would have looked for after reading his songs. I loved to talk with him."

Betty felt, with a sense of pain, that Mrs. Faulkner's capable appreciation of his work must also have been a helpful delight to John. She herself had always thought of him so simply as John Kenadie, whom she had known all her life.

"I think John must have enjoyed knowing you, as well," she managed to reply. Then, in spite of herself, she sighed wearily. The falseness of it all! Did she not know that this woman had made John love her?

Mrs. Faulkner looked at the girl tenderly.

"Betty," she said gently, "I know that you and John Kenadie have had a sweethearts' quarrel. But you must make it up. You must both be happy. You love him, Betty. And he loves you dearly."

"He does not love me," answered Betty. "It is you he loves."

An unhappy silence followed Betty's quiet speech. It was broken by Mrs. Faulkner.

"You surely do not know what you are saying, Betty," she said. "I am a married woman, dear. You have no right to say such a thing to me. You should not even think such a thing."

"Mrs. Faulkner," answered Betty, "it is not your fault that John loves you instead of me. But you know that he does. And you are going away because you know that what I say about his loving you is true."

"Betty!" cried the older woman, "you must tell me why you talk in this manner! You have heard something that has made you unhappy. What is it, Betty?"

"I do not mind telling you, Mrs. Faulkner," replied Betty. "I know that John went to see you Saturday and told you he loved you. And the reason I know that you are a good woman is because you sent him back to me."

There was a sudden flash of pride in the girl's eyes.

"But I will not take him on those terms!" she cried. "I will not!"

"Who told you these things?" Mrs. Faulkner asked.

"Hugh Latham saw you and John Kenadie," Betty answered. "Mrs. Faulkner, what he saw

was no fault of yours. I am sure of that. But he saw the meeting between you and John. And he saw John with you in his arms. He saw him kissing you. Yet you sent John away. It was good of you!"

The girl fronted the married woman proudly.

"But I am not grateful to you!" she cried. "I do not want your pity. I have told John that he cannot come back to me from making love to you!"

Betty's shapely little head was held high.

"I told John what Hugh had told me," she continued; "and he said that Hugh had spoken the truth about him. But he defended you. He said that you had sent him back to me. He was honest about it. He made me believe him because I saw that he was honest."

A little break came in her voice.

"That is all, Mrs. Faulkner," she said. "I will say good-by now. There is no reason why we should talk about this any longer. I am sorry not to be more friendly. But it cannot be helped."

"I am not going yet, Betty," Mrs. Faulkner answered.

For a little time she looked frankly at Betty. Regret and pain were in her eyes. Then she spoke again.

"You have been fair with me, Betty," she said. "I like you for that, because you could easily have believed that I was to blame. So I will be fair

with you. I shall not let you go on believing wrong of John Kenadie, your sweetheart. You have got to listen to me."

Betty was silent.

"If I am not terribly mistaken," said Mrs. Faulkner, "John Kenadie told you more than that I had sent him back to you. He told you that he loved you and would always love you. He begged you to forgive him. Did he not, Betty?"

"He was ashamed and sorry!" cried Betty. "And you had sent him away. He tried to think then that he did love me. He was ashamed!"

"Be ashamed yourself!" quickly retorted Mrs. Faulkner, her gray eyes darkening with reproachful anger. "Be ashamed, Betty Thorndike, for so cruelly misjudging a man who has loved you all his life! The pity of it! The pity of it! He could not quit loving you even if he tried! His whole soul is bound up in you! God has made him so that he can never love any other woman as he loves you! And you yourself ought to know him well enough to know this!"

Betty looked at Mrs. Faulkner, startled.

"I mean to be honest with you!" Mrs. Faulkner cried. "It is not for your sake, however. It is for his. John Kenadie did tell me that he loved me. He thought he loved me. But he did not—not for one minute of time. You had been unfair and unkind to him. I was good to him. He thought he loved me. He did not. No woman

could fail to see it in John Kenadie's eyes if he really loved her. You surely must know that, Betty. He did not love me. But he is a man, and I had a certain charm for him. Men are not like women, Betty. There is something in the best of them — something they think is love, when it is not love. It was this which was awakened in John Kenadie for me!"

Mrs. Faulkner's face had grown very pale.

"I am honest about myself, too, am I not?" she asked, a trifle bitterly. "Well, that's because I'm facing the whole truth. I told him he loved you, and he denied it. He said he had loved you, but he loved you no longer. And then, Betty, and then, the knowledge came to him that I had spoken the truth! He saw that it was still you he loved. He saw that he had, somehow, been false to the only love he could ever know. It came upon him in a flash. I could read his thought in his eyes. It was like print! It was like print! No woman could have failed to see it. And so he came back to you, Betty, repentant, remorseful, not because I had sent him back, not because I went away from him, but because his heart was breaking at the thought of his faithlessness to you! He told me once that he did not think he could live without loving you. I do not believe you love him if you could understand him no better than to send him away. I do not know how it is possible for a woman who does love him to look into his eyes and

not know him through and through. Betty, you must have been blind! You must have been blind!"

Betty was crying softly when Mrs. Faulkner's impetuous speech ended. Suddenly she slid down on her knees, her head in Mrs. Faulkner's lap. She was crying bitterly now.

"Betty! Betty!" said Mrs. Faulkner. "It cannot be that you persist in believing that John Kenadie does not love you! It seems incredible — and you a woman!"

There was a queer little hush following this. Then Betty Thorndike lifted her face to Mrs. Faulkner, and it was shining with a gladness that was beautiful to see.

"I love him so! I love him so!" she cried. "Oh, if you only knew, Mrs. Faulkner, how my heart was aching all this time! And now you have made me see the truth! It was good of you! Oh, it was good of you!"

"It was, indeed, good of me," came Mrs. Faulkner's frank response, a strange little smile on her lips. "It was so good of me that I shall always count it to my credit when I hold a reckoning with myself. It was so good of me that I claim the right to tell you now what you must do, and to make you promise to do it. You must send for John Kenadie. You sent him away and you must bring him back. If he will not come, you must even go to him. Do you hear what I am saying, Betty?"

Betty held Mrs. Faulkner's hand. There was a faint and glad pressure of understanding.

"When he comes," said Mrs. Faulkner, "you must not only forgive him—that's the least important part of it, now—but you must ask him to forgive you. Do you hear, Betty? And you must tell him that you love him and that you know how dearly he loves you. If you do not"—and here there was a little laugh from Mrs. Faulkner—"well, I'll be glad if you are unhappy after that! Will you promise to do this, Betty?"

"Yes, Mrs. Faulkner," answered Betty, "I promise to do it."

Then Betty rose and, stooping, kissed the other woman.

It was but a little while after this that Mrs. Faulkner said good-by.

Betty noticed, as the final words of farewell were being exchanged between them, that a man on horseback stopped and spoke with the driver of Mrs. Faulkner's carryall at the gate. There was an unusual emphasis of gesticulation on his part. Then he rode rapidly away. The girl did not accompany her visitor to the carriage.

As Mrs. Faulkner reached it, Betty saw the negro driver lean down towards her and say something in an excited manner. On the instant a quick cry of fear and horror sprang from Mrs. Faulkner's lips. She covered her eyes with a swift movement of the hands as if to shut from them the

sight of some dreadful thing, swaying for a moment like one about to fall. Then, suddenly, she turned, her face deadly white, and came uncertainly up the garden walk towards the waiting figure at the gallery steps. Betty ran to meet her, terrified.

"Betty! Oh, poor girl!" Mrs. Faulkner's hands were fluttering about the younger woman as though they would shield her from some great hurt. "Betty! My God, it is dreadful! Oh, child, be brave, be brave! I cannot control myself and yet I must tell you. Please, please, be strong, Betty! John Kenadie and Hugh"—

"They have quarreled!" cried Betty. "Something awful has happened! I was afraid of it! I warned John against Hugh! Has Hugh shot him? Oh, Mrs. Faulkner, John has been killed, John has been killed! I see it in your eyes!"

Mrs. Faulkner's arms were around the girl.

"God have mercy on them both, Betty!" she said, her words a cry of awe. "They met and fought in the village. Both are hurt, Hugh dangerously, and John Kenadie—oh, Betty dear, John Kenadie is dying!"

For a moment the two women stood locked in each other's arms.

Then Betty sank fainting to the ground.

## XXX

### THE SHADOW IS LIFTED

LITTLE Miss Sugarlump, her bonnet on, stood ready and waiting.

"There's the buggy now, John," she said, "and I must be going, dear."

John Kenadie, white and thin, but convalescent, looked up.

"And you'll sell the farm to-day, mother?" he asked quietly. "It will belong to Judge Yarbrough when you come back — home?"

"Please God," replied Miss Sugarlump, "it will, Sonnie. Then we can go away from L'Anguille, dear, and begin over again."

She looked wistfully at John.

"Do you mind it so much, Sonnie dear?" she asked. "You have been raised here in L'Anguille. Does it hurt you that we must go away?"

John went to Miss Sugarlump's side.

"Mother," he answered, "I could not live here and be happy, any more than you. I would be thinking of Betty all the time. And when she marries Hugh — I cannot help the feeling, mother, I cannot help the feeling — the old trouble would come upon me again!"

"God forbid!" said Miss Sugarlump.

She drew John's haggard face down to hers and kissed him.

"We must go away, Sonnie," she said. "The old-time fear is in my soul now deeper and stronger than ever. It is not your fault, dear. It is my fault, I reckon. But we cannot live here where Hugh is. We must go away."

She kissed John again.

"Good-by, Sonnie," she whispered, "I won't be gone long."

Then she went on her sad little mission.

John Kenadie sat listless when she had gone. From his invalid's chair on the gallery he could hear Uncle Shadrach and Aunt Marg'ret in one of their frequent and harmless connubial quarrels at the side of the house where Aunt Marg'ret was shelling peas. But its humor fell now on unheeding ears. John's weary eyes gazed straight ahead into the hopeless future.

He must go away from L'Anguille. Betty would marry Hugh. He must go away and try to put Betty out of his life. It was the end of the story.

Betty's voice called to him as this thought came.

"John!" she cried softly. "John!"

She was at the gate, entering.

Straight to where he stood waiting, weak and gaunt from his wounds, came Betty. She fronted him bravely, though blushing.

"I will not wait till you are strong enough to come to me," she said; "I come to you. It is a promise I have made."

John's eyes were hungrily fixed on her.

"It is a promise I gave to Mrs. Faulkner," Betty said.

"To Mrs. Faulkner?" John asked, troubled.

"She told me all the truth," said Betty. "She made me see how light and false and hard and cruel I had been to you. She made me promise to ask your forgiveness."

John was trembling with a sudden mad hope.

"John Kenadie," asked Betty, blushing deeply, "will you forgive me for it all? Won't you forgive me?"

But John did not answer the question in words. He saw his own forgiveness in Betty's eyes, and love besides, and he caught the girl in his arms.

"All my life long," he said, "I will thank God for this day!"

Betty dimpled a little. "And so will I," she said.

When little Miss Sugarlump returned, John Kenadie took Betty Thorndike's hand boldly in his and went to meet his mother. Yet he did not at once tell her how things stood with Betty and him.

For Miss Sugarlump's eyes were shining, too,

with a great and sudden happiness. She had been crying, but now her face was radiant.

"Sonnie, dear," she said, "we will not go away!"

"Mother!" cried John, "what is it?"

"I have seen Hugh," answered little Miss Sugarlump. "I met him on my way to Judge Yarbrough's. And I went no farther."

"You met Hugh?" repeated John, mystified.  
"Well, mother?"

Miss Sugarlump broke down, sobbing.

"Poor Hugh!" she cried. "Poor, lonely, desolate boy! He was coming to say good-by. He called me his aunt Sugarlump! He had heard that I meant to sell the farm and leave L'An guille. And he knew the reason. He is going away, instead — for my sake!"

John Kenadie felt a sudden tightening in his throat.

"He told me that I had suffered enough for his sin and his father's sin," said little Miss Sugarlump. "He could go away, he said, because Mrs. Poindexter did not need him and no one was dependent on him. And he would go away for my sake. He had loved me ever since he was a little boy, he said. And he kissed me when he said good-by."

A pitiful silence followed these words.

"Sonnie," suddenly said Miss Sugarlump,

"never again must you think unkindly of cousin Hugh. He told me to give you his love. will not come back to L'Anguille. He is d this for my sake and for your sake, dear. It v out all the past."

"It does, mother," replied John, "it does."

And with John's words the feud between Kenadies and the Lathams ended forever.

It was but a little later that old Gilbert I came.

He brought a mail parcel with him.

"They are the publishers' proofs of your po John," he proclaimed proudly. "God be than our dream is coming true, after all! But must get to work on them, John. We've l lot of time as it is, you know, and the public may grow impatient!"

The schoolmaster's fine old face was glo with ardor.

John's eyes were shining too.

Little Miss Sugarlump and Betty stood w~~ing~~ old Gilbert Rolfe and John Kenadie, tea and pupil, as they bent their heads together the proofs of John's poems.

Betty laughed softly.

"John Kenadie!" she cried, "if this is the you leave me, I cannot be your sweetheart longer!"

Upon which John, happily remembering, s to Betty as he had spoken to her when they

boy and girl together at old Gilbert Rolfe's school.

"Are you going to break my heart, Betty Thorn-dike?" he asked.

And Betty laughed, also remembering happily.







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